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MISS GODFREY AT SARATOGA, 1844.

The Spy Company

A Story of the Mexican War

By

ARCHIBALD CLAVERING GUNTER

AUTHOR OF

"MR. BARNES OF NEW YORK," "THE CITY OF
MYSTERY," ETC.

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THE SPY COMPANY.

BOOK I.

ESTRELLA GODFREY.

CHAPTER I.

SARATOGA IN EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR.

The summer night was falling softly upon Saratoga when that great watering place was scarce more than a village embowered in trees; when most of its present magnificent avenues were pretty turnpike roads and some only bridle paths; Saratoga when those who sought its summer retreat came to it leisurely, many of them by stage-coach, to find recreation in its pleasant country and health in the living waters of its sparkling springs; the Saratoga of 1844, before half a dozen converging railroads had made it part of our rushing, bustling, frantic, modern world; a quiet, serene picnic place only disturbed—by politics.

Even on this placid evening towards the end of August, though the lights of the big dining room of the old United States Hotel illuminated the great fancy dress ball of the season, Democrats and Whigs clashed as hotly upon the big verandas and tree shaded pleasance as they did at political joint discussions and torchlight demonstrations or even in the halls of Congress itself.

The scene was one of great beauty, the grounds of the hotel being made brilliant with colored lanterns and the ball-room vivacious by shepherdesses, Italian peasant girls, vivandieres and "queens of the night," who chatted coyly with courtiers, knights and troubadours; while bad imitations of Indians, inspired by brandy smashes and mint juleps uttered their war whoops in the bar-room or smoked their pipes of peace on the broad verandas with equally incompetent representatives of the trappers of the West and voyageurs of Canada.

Though the ladies were robed as queens, fairies, sylphs and maids of honor, and were supposed to exemplify every clime and every century since history began, still they could not forget they were American women, and their usual topics of conversation, rides to the lake, visits to the Indian encampments and even the all-pervading gossip as to how many glasses were drunk by each individual at the Congress Spring in the morning, were sometimes mixed with as excited annexation discussions as those indulged in by their cavaliers.

For the hardy band of pioneers, settlers and sometimes even fugitives from justice in the United States that had gradually, during preceding years, drifted across the Louisiana border had in 1836 achieved Texan independence, defeating the Mexican forces under Santa Anna in the pitched battle of San Jacinto, and avenging the cruel massacre of Goliad and the bloody shambles of the Alamo.

For eight years, though recognized by France, England and Spain, the young Republic had been in a quasi state of war with its mother country, Mexico, a large portion of its plains being raided over by alternate bands of rancho bandits and Comanche Indians.

Under these circumstances, Texas was in 1844 applying for annexation to the United States and admission into the American Union, a thing the Democracy under Mr. Polk were clamorous for, but which was bitterly assailed by Whigs and other Anti-Slavery advocates as leading to certain war with Mexico and the additional political complication of immense territorial extension within the slave belt.

Two ladies seated on one of the broad balconies of the hotel and looking in at the brilliant ball-room emphasize this.

"Honor bright, did you really drink six glasses of Congress water this morning, my dear Mrs. Perkins?" whispers Selina Chauncey, the dashing young wife of an Alabama Representative, robed as the Pompadour. "I was only able to absorb three, and my maid had to unlace me right afterwards."

This confidence is interrupted by a shiver from Queen Elizabeth, who on ordinary occasions is Mrs. Perkins, the spouse of a Whig Senator from Indiana. She is a prim matron of about fifty, and half shudders: "Did you ever! If that awful girl isn't bringing politics on her back into the ball-room."

"No, Madame, you do Miss Godfrey injustice," replies Selina Chauncey, stoutly. "She is carrying patriotism, not politics, upon her fair shoulders. What finer idea for a Texan girl than to depict her countrymen's appeal for the aid of their cousins of the United States against the bully Mexico."

"Why, I did not know Miss Godfrey was a Texan," says Mrs. Perkins; "she came here from New York with Mr. Martin and his family. Clara Martin and she are like sisters."

"Oh, mercy! Ain't you aware she is the greatest heiress in Texas, that is, if her father's, old Jim Godfrey's million acres of bottom land in that country,

which is being harried by Mexican bandits and Comanche Indians, are ever healthy to live in. Estrella Larue Godfrey is Texan to the backbone!"

"And has got plenty of frontier boldness, which isn't nice in young girls," criticises the Whig lady. "See, the crowd are even clapping their hands at her. It's disgraceful!"

"Why shouldn't they applaud her?" retorts Mrs. Chauncey, "Miss Godfrey represents the State of Texas half draped in the American flag, which will wholly drape it when we Democrats, this autumn, have elected Mr. Polk, President; Mr. Clay and you Whigs to the contrary notwithstanding."

"Never! The American people are not crazy. Mr. Clay will be triumphantly returned!" cries the other, stamping her foot, and a political riot might take place right on the balcony of the hotel between these two distinguished ladies, did not a young Arkansas gentleman, who has just strolled out of the bar-room, ejaculate enthusiastically: "Cock a doodle for Miss Texas!" and a young American dandy, who has just returned from European travel, ask laughingly: "What is Texas?"

At this the two political ladies forget their dispute in a burst of laughter, especially as old Jupiter Perkins, the Whig war horse from Indiana, saunters up about this time, taps his wife playfully upon the shoulder and says: "What, Sally, you and Selina quarreling again?" Then adjusting his spectacles he adds: "Over that young lady, I presume. She carries with her the charm of beauty and the exquisite womanhood of America, and looks mighty well in the star spangled banner; but she's too young to be dragged into politics. I think I'll go up and get introduced to the Republic of Texas."

"Yes, but don't you let her beguile you to vote for

the Mexican War," whispers his wife. "She's so beautiful, she may make a fool of you, Jupiter."

This might easily be true, for Saratoga has rarely seen a prettier picture than was made that evening by Miss Estrella Larue Godfrey under the brilliant lights of the United States ball-room.

The girl is in the first budding of young womanhood. Her figure, not as yet completely developed, is perhaps too slight for perfect beauty, but gives promise of glorious maturity. Her patrician features would be strangely firm, for one so young, did not the modesty of her eyes make her face seem very soft and feminine. Embarrassed by the gaze of so many, for she is attracting almost universal attention, the shrinking diffidence of her pose and movements gives almost a pathos to her graceful figure.

Her fancy costume is that of the young Republic of Texas, a wreath of myrtles upon her brown hair, a single star of blue upon the white satin corsage of her robe, but over this a banner of the United States of the finest silken gauze, crossing her white shoulders, drapes her nascent bosom like a sash, and girdled about her lithe waist falls over a floating white skirt of shining satin.

It is as if the maid were the little Republic of Texas appealing for the protection of the powerful Republic whose inhabitants are of the same blood and same family against her tyrant Mexico.

Blazoned upon the front of the draping skirt is "Remember the Alamo!" words that even to-day make the Yankee heart beat faster at the heroism of the American race as shown by that little band, whose names still cause schoolboys' hearts to thrill when they hear of Travis, Bowie and Davy Crockett.

Blood is thicker than water, and many who have opposing political opinions look enthusiastically at the

daughter of one of those emigrants that wandered away from the United States and with rifle and bowie knife carved out a little nation from haughty Mexico, watering their new country pleuteously with their blood upon the rich bottom lands of the Brazos, Trinity and San Antonio, the sun dried mesas of the Llano Estacado and the arid wastes of the Rio Grande.

Faltering under this admiration, which is probably much greater than she had expected, the maiden droops diffidently, and perhaps would retreat from the brilliant illumination of the ball-room to the more dimly-lighted verandas did not at this moment Clara Martin, a dashing, direct-speaking New York girl dressed as a vivandiere, come tripping up to her, and swinging the canteen she carries over her shoulder, cry laughingly: "Take a swig from my canteen and brace up, Stella. Here's a chance to make a hit for your Lone Star country. Let me present to you the Honorable Jupiter Perkins, the Whig war horse. Convert him, my dear, to Texan annexation!"

Whereupon the bashful look flies out of Miss Godfrey's face, her beautiful brown eyes beam like the emblem of her native land. She glances at the Senator from Indiana, and proceeds to do the best she can with the old Whig war horse, saying with charming naivete: "Wouldn't you like me for a country-woman, Mr. Perkins?"

"Do coons like possum?" laughs the Senator, adding to this proverb of the Mississippi Valley: "Judging by the looks of the boys about you, I imagine you can become a citizeness of the United States, Miss Godfrey, as soon as a parson can be procured and without the annexation of the State of Texas."

Though the girl blushes painfully, she cries determinedly: "A flank attack is not fair, Mr. Senator," and inspired by the thoughts of her distant country,

this élève in diplomacy dares to assault the politics of the veteran statesman; of course without effect. Old Jupe Perkins has not been thirty years a dyed-in-the-wool Whig of the Clay-Webster stripe, to be converted by two pretty lips, though the animation of the interview adds the vivacity of many changing emotions to the exquisite features of the young proselyter.

Finally the veteran politician, growing perhaps tired of being almost lectured by this adolescent Hypatia, answers her in the pleasant condescension of age for youth. "My dear child, permit me to tell you that like most Democrats you are all abroad on the subject of slave extension, upon which you are making a very pretty stump speech."

"Child! I am eighteen!" cries the girl, indignantly. "Know nothing of the subject? I was born in Texas, sir!"

"Yes, born in Texas, but sent from there when almost a baby, I believe. Your friend of friends, that pert little vivandiere, Clara Martin, before she introduced me to you, let that cat out of the bag. Miss Yancy's Boarding School on West Eighth Street, I reckon also, isn't exactly the place to study one of the greatest political questions of the age. If Mr. Polk and Mr. Calhoun couldn't convert me, I hardly think you can, though——" The Senator palliates his remark by adding: "You talk much prettier than old James Knox P. of North Carolina."

"You're right! I was sent from Texas to save me from the dangers of its wild life after my dear little sister had been stolen by Indians or bandits," answers Miss Godfrey, her bright face growing strangely sad. "That's what was told me by my mother, who came with me, and died here when I was a very little girl, leaving me alone, save for the kindness of Clara Martin and her father, for my father has not been able to visit

me. He has been fighting in the War of Texan Independence, and since then has been defending his property against the raids of partisans, bandits and Comanches. You're right, Mr. Perkins, I know very little of the subject except from my dear father's letters to a child who petitions you to induce your great country to take such action as will permit him to recall his daughter to his roof-tree protected by a flag sufficiently powerful to make his home safe both from Mexican forays and Indian ravages."

This speech, made pathetic by a bewitching face whose eyes are tearily beseeching, strangely affects the old Whig war horse. He mutters huskily: "You have said more to me in the last few words, my dear young lady, than any other Democratic stump speaker in the country. I will consider your appeal."

But even as Estrella gives him a bright, grateful glance, the veteran of New World affairs starts, gazes searchingly at her, and becomes strangely moved and interested. His eyes are fixed upon a plain circlet of gold that is pinned upon the corsage of her dress.

Noting his glance, she says: "Oh, you are gazing at the golden circle! Strange, several gentlemen have been interested in it this evening. What makes you regard so curiously a bauble which my mother brought with her from Texas, and told me my father used to wear? It is the only thing I have to remember him by."

"My dear child," says the veteran statesman, quite moved, "to explain what that means would be beyond my power, because I only guess at it myself. Therefore I shall not cloud your bright young brow with conjectures. What you want to do this evening is to give the boys a chance and turn your attention to love, at which you'll be even cuter than politics!"

At this suggestion, the young lady blushes vividly;

then a troubled look comes upon her innocent features, she hangs her head.

"Hello! By the confusion on your face, you've been at it already!" grins the Solon.

This insinuation Miss Estrella, with quick feminine tact and precocious astuteness, parries by opening her bright eyes and saying naively: "Law, Senator Perkins, I haven't left boarding school! I am only eighteen."

"Humph, a girl of your eyes can do a good deal of damage at that age," chuckles the Western war horse. But getting away from the Texan Hypatia, he mutters to himself grimly: "Her dad went to Texas wearing one of those tarnation golden circles. By the Eternal, is the curse started by the ambition of that schemer Aaron Burr never to be lifted from us?"

Sitting upon the balcony of the hotel, the Western statesman goes into a meditation, refusing glumly all invitations to liquor from kindred statesmen in so abstracted and morose a manner that Quigley of Illinois whispers to Buncombe of Ohio: "I wonder if the great Perkins is afraid of losing his seat in the Senate at the coming general election."

"Can't tell," remarks Congressman Buncombe. "It's going to be a tarnation hard fight and Polk may become President on this Texas enthusiasm. 'Remember the Alamo' is getting to be a war cry that stampedes Whigs during this campaign as it did Greasers down at San Jacinto. Just look at that girl there in the ball-room. With that tarnation catchy political riggin' and those languishing bright eyes of hers, she'd be as good as a thousand votes to the Democratic ticket if the polls were open to-morrow at Saratoga. Do you see her? Look at the young fellows prancing about her like bears round honey."

"Some of them will get bee's stings from her bright

eyes if they don't hold their horses," guffaws Quigley, who represents the First Congressional District of Illinois and is considered rather a wag in the House.

Quigley is pretty near right in his divination. Mr. Senator Perkins has shot very close to the bull's-eye when he twitted Miss Estrella Larue Godfrey as to her love affairs. Her eighteen-year-old eyes have done already considerable damage to half a score of admirers, but more especially to young Charley Pelham of New York, just graduated from West Point and gazetted into the Second Dragoons, and Mr. Jasper Carew Moncton, who is reputed at "The Springs" to be a Louisiana planter.

Accompanied by his mother, who dotes upon him, a beautiful lady of middle age, the first of these is in Saratoga enjoying his two months' leave before entering active duty. The second, Mr. Moncton, has apparently no object except pleasure at the Springs.

Mr. Pelham being engaged in escorting his mother to her room and bidding her a tender good night, has left the field, for the moment, open to his rival, and Jasper Moncton is taking advantage of it.

Dressed in the clawhammer coat of deep rolled collar, embossed velvet vest, tight fitting trousers spread out over patent leather pumps, and with an elaborate black stock, which indicate the extreme of a beau's evening costume of that period, this gentleman, who is about thirty years of age, is now at Miss Godfrey's side.

He has an active, well proportioned figure and a bearing marked by a quick confidence and self-assertion. His face would be prepossessing and his dark eyes engaging, were it not for their extraordinary alertness, his glances at times being so rapid that their expression can scarcely be distinguished. These at present, however, are fixed upon Miss Godfrey. The

gentleman's manner is unusually suave, yet extremely confident, and his eager attentions to Estrella rather pleasing to the vanity of one who is still a school girl.

Mr. Moncton's devotion to the object of his pursuit for the past few weeks has been so marked that the more casual admirers about Miss Godfrey this evening, concluding that she favors him over the common herd, have gradually left them to their own society. Relieved of witnesses, a curious possession has entered the gentleman's bearing. Even very young girls have instinct in these matters, and Moncton's passion is now sufficiently marked to cause Estrella to grow nervous and more distant in her manner.

But Jasper Moncton is not to be easily repulsed or shaken off by one he deems scarce more than a child. Though he has in their two months' acquaintance received no real encouragement from Miss Estrella Godfrey, save the bright glances of happy maidenhood, he is stimulated perhaps more by her indifference than he would be by her complaisance. And in the last few days the gentleman has grown very jealous of her.

Young Charley Pelham, with his dashing military West Point air, boyish enthusiasm and open heart, has gazed so ardently with his brilliant eyes that Moncton fears that if he does not speak now, the ardent officer will have his say to beauty before him.

Therefore with considerable tact and a certain easy, take-it-for-granted manner, he shortly succeeds in leading the young heiress of Texas lands to a secluded nook on the big piazza which a lot of shrubbery and flag decorations have cut off from the better lighted part of the hotel, making just the sort of temple a man can worship his goddess in—if she will let him.

Tired with her political propaganda, Miss Godfrey sinks rather languidly into a seat; then delights her admirer by murmuring: "I am glad converting old Sen-

ator Perkins is over. From now on I am going to forget politics and have a pleasant evening."

"Thank you," says the gentleman very ardently. Encouraged by the compliment, though the girl means nothing by it, he seats himself by her side and begins a tale that always frightens a true daughter of Eve when she for the first time in her young life hears it. Aside from a maid's bashfulness, the primal knowledge that she has a man's life in her keeping, a man's career in her hand to take or to throw away, awes any thinking debutante in the mysteries of Venus's Temple, and Miss Estrella Godfrey is much frightened. The impetuous fervor of her suitor at first stuns her as well as alarms her. She is so dazed she has nearly been kissed and called his own before she recovers sentiency sufficient to shrink from his clasp and say: "Stop! You—you have misunderstood my silence."

"Misunderstood you?" mutters Moncton as if stunned himself. "No, no, I cannot have misunderstood you. In the last few blessed weeks, you have permitted me to ride with you so often—you have——"

"But always with Clara cantering along on the other side of me," stammers the neophyte in flirtation.

"You have looked upon me."

"But only as a friend. Besides," the maid adds disingenuously, "Mr. Martin would never permit my being wooed without the consent of my father."

But to her astonishment, this mention of her father adds to Moncton's confidence. Jasper says in easy assertion: "Your father, I am certain, were he here, would add his commands to my entreaties."

"Impossible!" cries Miss Godfrey, astounded. "My father is in Texas, at the other end of the world. Besides, he would never coerce me on such a subject, though I never could say yes without his blessing."

Noting that assurance does not aid his suit, Mr.

Moncton pleads earnestly: "You cannot mean to refuse a love like mine."

"But I do mean to refuse it." Then the girl whispers penitently: "Forgive me, I don't wish to be harsh in my rejection, but I'm only a school-girl. I have never been proposed to before. Take pity on me—don't be angry with me."

"Angry with you?" Hope flies again into the man's eyes. "Angry with *you*? That's impossible, Estrella."

Again the moustache is coming closer to the tempting lips. The gentleman's arm is almost about the slight waist, when womanhood triumphs over immaturity, and the girl desperately pulls herself from him and says sternly: "Don't mistake kindness for anything else, Sir. If I must make it plain to you, I—I do not love you."

"You—you love another?" Moncton's eyes have grown sinister, even baneful.

"Oh, no," sighs the interrogated one, "I—I hope not—I——"

"Ah, then you *do* love another!"

"I—I don't know anything about it," answers Miss Godfrey petulantly. She is scarce more than a child, and this dominant man's persistency annoys her. "But I tell you I can never love you."

"But you *will* marry me!" answers the wooer commandingly; the plain golden circle pinned upon the damsel's bosom seeming to lend confidence to his tones. "By that little sign upon your breast which you do not understand but I do, I tell you I shall make the winning of you the object of my life. My child, you are as surely mine as if the priest had said man and wife to you and me!" His blazing eyes enforce his fervid words.

Under the possessive passion of his glances, the girl'

grows crimson to her shoulders and cries indignantly: "When you look at me like that, I—I hate you!"

Stung by her words and made carelessly vindictive by her scorn, he retorts sneeringly yet arrogantly: "You are a little crude yet. I am in no hurry. A year or two and you will be the riper cherry for the plucking, little one. Good-bye! Every time you think of your father, remember you are as surely mine as if you had said yes instead of no. Look on the golden circle pinned upon your corsage and know it is my wedding ring!"

"No, no, anything but that!" almost screams the predicted bride, made frantic by his sneering and astounding words; but he, not answering her, saunters away in affected nonchalance, carelessly pausing as he passes through the potted palm trees to light a cigar.

Alone, Miss Godfrey takes three short breaths and gasps mentally: "Thank God, this dastard's anger unmasked him. And he has the assurance to say my father would support his suit!" she jeers. "Half an hour ago I thought him a passingly pleasant gentleman, but was indifferent to him. Now I know Mr. Moncton, I despise him, I loathe him. I could never love him." Agitated by both rage and shame, she sinks into a seat again, communes tremblingly with her fair self, and finally enunciates to herself this curious proposition: "Strange, the knowledge given me by this wretch's audacious assault not only on my heart but on my very modesty has made me doubt whether I could love any man."

Her meditations are broken in upon by a young, liquid but savage feminine voice which says in uncompromising familiarity: "Strella, you wretch, come with me to papa at once. You have got me in an awful scrape. We are both to be sent back to boarding school to-morrow."

Miss Clara Martin is standing beside her, looking as distressed as if she were a real vivandiere of the grand army of Napoleon reflecting on Waterloo.

"How have I got you into a scrape, Clara, dear?" asks Miss Godfrey sweetly.

"How? By permitting the attentions of that horrible Mr. Moncton. Pa has found out about him; says he is nothing more than a Mississippi River gambler. And then going into seclusion and sitting with him here till half the women in the hotel are tearing you in pieces with their tongues."

"You are right! I do deserve to be sent back to boarding school for letting that wretch tell me whether I like or no that he will marry me," shudders the accused one impulsively.

"Yes, but you're not right in getting me sent back also when I was having such a lovely time. Good heavens! How shall I tell poor Jack Boulder? He and I were going to have a tete-a-tete picnic out on the lake to-morrow," mutters Clara. "Anyway, you're punished also. Young fiery eyed Pelham of the Dragoons won't have a chance to make love to you any more."

"I hope he won't," says Estrella sadly. "I hope no man will, for now I know I shall never love any man."

At this pessimistic declaration, Miss Clara Martin, who is a dashing brunette of the most vivacious type, slightly more matured than her friend, laughs: "Idiot! When you love, you will be spoonier than I can be;" then cries: "But come on, Pa has given his orders. Zelma has half packed your trunks already and Elise is now at work on mine," adding philosophically: "Anyway, summer is nearly over, and if I had stayed here much longer, that crazy Jack Boulder would have made a fool of either himself or me." With this, Miss Martin goes away humming quite cheerfully "Wait for the Wagon."

Miss Godfrey would follow her chum to her guardian, did not a handsome young fellow in accurate evening dress but with that indescribable set up and military bearing that West Point always gives to its graduates stop her for a few hurried words. "I was detained by my mother, who is not very well this evening, Miss Estrella," he says quite tenderly and almost apologetically. "But now——"

"Now I am going to pack my trunks," answers the young lady, slightly agitated at his fervid eyes. To refuse two men in one evening would be too much for her inexperienced nerves, and Charley Pelham is a gentleman she not only respects but likes very much.

"Pack your trunks?" falters the young man, as if he does not understand.

"Yes, I am going to be sent back to school to-morrow. A big dragoon like you fighting Indians on the plains will soon forget a fledgling, and from now on I have got to think of French, music and grammar, or Miss Yancy will haul me over the coals."

Cadet hops and West Point flirtations have given Charley Pelham a fairly shrewd insight into the emotions and characteristics of girlhood. He divines what a terrible effort it must be for sweet eighteen to dub herself a child. He appreciates the sacrifice the pretty lips are making to prevent his speaking words that will call for a woman's answer. He looks at her piercingly for a moment; then sighs: "I—I fear I understand you. Good-bye!" next says hoarsely: "But just one souvenir of a sweet two months." Before she can stay him he has torn a portion of the American flag from her costume.

"Some day I will bring this back to you; some day when you are a woman," he mutters, and kisses the token.

Just for one moment she turns and whispers: "But forgive the child!" then flits from him.

Gazing after her till her graceful figure grows dim in the vista of the great veranda whose lights are still shining brilliantly on fair women and brave men, Pelham puts his hand to his heart and mutters to himself: "Child as she is, had she but loved me, she would have cried with every breath to me: 'Woman! *Woman!* WOMAN!'"

Then the gay scene seems very gloomy to the young West Pointer, and the sweet music of the Siren Waltzes played by the Boston Orchestra appears very poor melody and full of discords.

As for the man whose audacious prophecy and uncontrolled passion has brought about not only his own undoing but his rival's; he had long ago wandered away and joined some friends in the bar-room. Drinking did not make him forget, and smoking moodily during the long summer night, Jasper Moncton held consultation with himself. Once he mentally exclaims: "I was a little foolish to let my temper run away with me; but just as sure as no horse can trot in 2:20,* that little saucy puss shall call me husband and fawn upon me for a caress. What Jasper Moncton wants, he has!"

The charming girl's piquant rejection of this sporting man of the South and West, both sections rather barbaric in the early forties, makes him desire her all the more; not that Jasper Moncton loves Estrella Godfrey, but he is determined to have the butterfly that he is chasing. Miss Godfrey's Texas lands will be worth a lot of money when the flag of the United States floats over them. Glancing at a little in-

*At that time Flora Temple had not trotted her mile in 2:19- $\frac{3}{4}$, and the trotting record of 2:20 was regarded an impossibility.—*Editor.*

signia he wears upon his breast, he thinks: "As Knight of the Golden Circle, I know this will come very soon." For his information as an officer of that mysterious yet baneful society, whose branches spread out from New Orleans over the South and West* tells him

* This mysterious society, "The Knights of the Golden Circle," was supposed by many to have been an off-shoot from the secret organization brought together by Aaron Burr, which resulted in the trial of that ambitious politician for treason in 1807.

Though known to many, it was whispered of by few. It was supposed to be devoted not only to the extension of slavery, but to the forming of an immense slave empire that should include the Isles of the West Indies and the vast country of the Montezumas.

Many of the efforts at slave territorial extension came from this powerful but silent organization. A great many of the young drifting adventurers of the United States inspired or secretly directed by it went to Texas with the object of annexing not only that state but all of the Mexican Confederacy. At the triumphant close of the Mexican war, when this country had obtained from its defeated opponent not only Texas but California, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona and parts of Colorado and Nevada, it was predicted that the next military advance would add every foot of Mexican soil to the United States; of course, as slave states.

The Golden Circle inspired the filibustering expeditions of Walker in 1856 to Nicaragua; likewise the tragic attempt upon Sonora made by Californians; also the invasions in 1848, '50 and '51, of Nariisse Lopez into Cuba.

It flourished from 1840 to 1860 like the Upas tree, giving out an atmosphere baneful yet intangible, and by its occult influence had doubtless much to do with the action of many politicians which brought about the war between the States and watered this land with the blood of myriads of brave men.

But little has been written about the powerful but mysterious association: an innate dread of discussing it seemed to linger over the United States until it and its barbaric object and ambitious hopes died at Gettysburg when Picket's immortal charge failed, and the starry banner of the Confederate States began to fade.—*Editor.*

that the United States is upon the eve of one of its grand territorial grabs, such as take place every second generation, when the great Yankee nation takes another portion of the world into its embrace and Uncle Sam tosses a few more stars into the blue firmament of its flag and makes a few more sovereign states to add to this great American Commonwealth.

Turning this over in his mind, Jasper Moncton remarks to himself half laughingly: "Strella's as skittish as a filly when she first feels the rope. Reckon the haughty little beauty would have been more scared if she guessed why I came up North. Then a blazing triumph lights up his dark eyes as he mutters these remarkable words: "Calculate this high society around here makes her too bumptious to look at a plain riverboat sporting man. Texas is my gaming-table!"

CHAPTER II.

WAR WITH MEXICO.

Early in 1846, eighteen months after Miss Godfrey's Saratoga adventure, old Alexander Martin, who has her under his wing, addresses his charge one brisk February day in the library of his handsome New York house in University Place. This gentleman is the head of Martin, Best & Co., very prominent commission merchants of South Street and factors for Southern planters, the firm doing a large business in the sugar of Louisiana, the cotton of the Gulf States, the tar and turpentine of North Carolina, as well as business with the West Indies, Vera Cruz and Mexico, and the little budding seaport of Galveston, Texas, where they have a small branch office. There is a

rather sad glint in his grim, determined, commercial eyes as he says: "I might as well break the news and get over with it 'Strella. I have a letter from your father in which he asks me to send you to Texas."

"Thank God, at last I shall see my father!" The girl's voice rings out true, silvery, hopeful. "Ever since I left school six months ago I have been waiting, hoping, praying for his permission to join him."

"Humph, but you do not know exactly what Texas is, my dear," remarks the old merchant. "Even now, though the United States has taken it under its wing, it is a debatable land and very rough and tough people are debating about it. A number of its settlers, as your mother must have told you, were fugitives from justice both of the United States and Mexico. Therefore it has a good many lawless people still among its inhabitants. You do not know Texas, my child."

"Don't I?" cries the young lady, the ringing tones of her voice and the flashing of her eyes in charming contrast with the delicate lineaments of her patrician face and the lightness of her graceful figure. "I know it is the country of the dead heroes of the Alamo and Goliad and the live ones of San Jacinto. I know it is the country my dear father fought and bled for under old Sam Houston; the country I was born in; *my* country, though I cannot remember it."

"Very well," responds the veteran of commerce, shortly, "when will you be ready to go?"

"Now; to-morrow; any time! The sooner the better!" Expectant love and enthusiastic tenderness dim the girl's bright eyes; she murmurs: "My father. At last, I shall see him and I shall know him!"

"Under these circumstances," replies the merchant, putting his hand over his eyes as if anxious to conceal the sadness of parting with this girl he has had under his charge since the death of her mother, some

eight years before this, "you had better tell my daughter at once, so that you and Clara can get your farewell tears over as soon as possible. Make the arrangements and do the shopping I presume a young lady of New York fashion will find necessary before leaving for a half barbarous land. I presume you will have a long visit at Mr. Stewart's marble store, and this check will be convenient for you."

"Did my father send all that money for me?" queries Miss Godfrey, gazing at the piece of paper. "Hasn't he always been generous to the child whose face he cannot remember, to the girl whose eyes might look upon him and not know him?" This she a moment after contradicts by ejaculating: "But no, I am sure some instinct would tell me if I looked on his dear face!"

"Pish, I'm hardly so certain of that," dissents old Martin, who is seated at his desk. "You have no miniature of your father, not even one of these new fangled daguerreotypes."

"Daguerreotypes were not invented when I was carried away from Texas, and portrait painters would have hardly been able to take care of their scalps in the land my mother has described to me. Bowie knives, rifles and pistols were more in vogue than artists' paint brushes or pencils in the valleys of the Brazos, San Antonio and Trinity. You have never seen my father either, Mr. Martin?" continues the girl. "As soon as I see him I'll write you a good long description of the man who has become by his correspondence your friend."

"Humph, yes! Of course, I have never seen Jim Godfrey," replies the merchant, "though I have been his factor since 1836. You know at that time old John Kissam Horner, who was in the Texas trade, was your father's agent, but owing to commercial troubles

brought about by the Texan revolution, Horner failed and left New York. Then your father turned his account over to me by a letter that I could hardly decipher. Though he writes better now, his correspondence is generally pretty terse and to the point."

"Oh, yes, I know," assents Estrella, "when poor papa's hand was so frightfully injured in the fight at Rock Springs he could for six months hardly hold a pen in it at all, and the few lines he could send my dear mother seemed so different. Why, even she could hardly recognize his handwriting. But papa's words were just as loving, even when wounded nigh unto death. I am going to make a very dutiful daughter to my father for all the sacrifices he has made for me, giving me plenty of money when money must have been hard to obtain."

"Well, it's hard enough for him to get now, for the troubles of Texas are not entirely over, my dear, and it is that which makes me hesitate about sending you," mutters the man of affairs.

"That you shall not do. I must go. I will go. My father is growing old. He needs a daughter's hand!" cries Estrella excitedly.

"And you do not hesitate to give up New York gaiety and fashion?"

"Not a bit," answers the girl, self-devotion in her eyes. "As I sat at the opera last night down at Castle Garden, I thought of the frivolity of the thing and longed to be able to do what I consider my duty."

"But the young men about here, the gay gallants who ride beside you each day up Harlem Lane; likewise the bucks of Bond Street, and the beaux of Broadway and Washington Square; how about them? Clara has confessed to me that they are very engaging. And with your face and figure!" Martin turns his old eyes admiringly over the exquisite picture the

young lady makes as she stands in graceful pose, one white hand upon a chair as if uncertain whether to stay or go, and notes that Miss Godfrey has developed very beautifully in the last few months.

In addition to a patrician form, whose rounded outlines are those of budding womanhood, the young lady's face has in its blossoming maturity become full of an exquisite soul that shines through her bright eyes right gloriously. She is dressed in the extreme of fashion of that day, a little Parisian bonnet on her brown hair, a white shawl of India crepe, the latest feminine fad, upon her graceful shoulders, and a be-flounced skirt whose fluffiness indicates the advent of the crinoline that a few years later is to startle, dismay and perhaps even allure civilized mankind.

About this time Miss Godfrey looks at the check again, and being thoroughly womanly, apparently longs for shopping. She says: "If you don't wish me any longer, I'll go and tell Clara, and we will drive down to Mr. Stewart's together. I shall have so much to buy."

"Don't take too much. Transportation will be difficult and the roads quagmires at this season in your future home."

"No, but I'll take enough to make me very presentable to papa and——"

"And Texan rangers," chuckles the old gentleman. Then, as the girl turns to the door, he says suddenly: "One moment. You will have to go in the *Belle of Georgia*, which sails for New Orleans early next week. Mr. and Mrs. Rodney of Galveston, Texas, are passengers upon it. They are old friends of mine. I have already spoken to them. They have kindly consented to take charge of you. From Galveston Mr. Rodney, who is a merchant there, will arrange your transportation to either Matagorda or Corpus Christi, where you will probably be met by your father."

"Corpus Christi? That's where Taylor's Army is now stationed. I know one of the officers in it, Mr. Pelham of the Dragoons. You recollect him at Saratoga," says Estrella excitedly.

"Yes, but that's one of the dangers that may come upon you. The minute Taylor's Army moves for the Rio Grande, it means war with Mexico, and that I fear will happen very soon."

"Then the quicker I go, the sooner I'll get to my father and avoid the dangers of Taylor's Army. I'll speak to Zelma. She will get to packing my trunks at once."

"She'd better get to packing her own, too."

Miss Godfrey is already at the entrance of the room, when, Mr. Martin's remark catching her ear, she pauses and says shortly: "I—I had nearly forgotten Zelma," then thinks a moment and continues: "Just a word about her." She steps quickly to him, and, apparently dreading to be overheard, commences to whisper into the ear of the gentleman who is seated at his desk.

To her the man of commerce listens for a moment, a look of astonishment spreading over his face. Then he utters a prolonged whistle and ejaculates: "By Tippecanoe, you're an extravagant young lady," meditates for a second or two, and dissentingly mutters: "That will be very inconvenient."

"Oh, please, please! Mr. Martin, please give her the opportunity."

"Very well," answers old Alexander. "It is difficult to refuse you anything, especially that you are going away. Do you think the girl will leave you?"

"Ah, that I am very doubtful about," whispers the young lady. "Zelma is devoted to me. Ever since my mother died, though she has acted as my maid, she has tried to be more than my mere servant. The parting

will be as sad for me as for her. But you must give her the opportunity."

"Jupiter, and rob your father of——"

"Hush!" cries Estrella, putting her fingers on his lips. "Promise!"

"Very well, Miss Wendel Philips," says the merchant. "Send her to me."

And Estrella having left him, Alexander Martin utters a short whistle and half laughs: "I wonder what my Southern correspondents would say to what I am going to do now. In fact, it is hardly honest to old Jim Godfrey himself." Over this he goes into a glum meditation, which is broken in upon by a soft and sonorously musical voice saying: "My mistress tells me you wish to see me, Sir."

With a start he looks up and remarks: "Yes, Miss Godfrey is going to Texas, Zelma."

"I have already heard that. I am about to pack our trunks and get ready as soon as possible."

"You are going with her?"

"Certainly. I—I could never leave her even if I had the option."

"You have that option now. You know what your station and condition will be when you reach Southern soil."

"The same as when I left it," the soft voice answers, sadly. "I thoroughly understand, but still I cannot leave my loved mistress. Her mother took me a slave waif from Louisiana, and by her kindness made me happy, taught me to read and write, gave me the opportunity to educate myself. When she died I promised to remain with her child."

As she has been speaking, Mr. Martin has been looking at the young woman, for she is only some twenty-six or seven years of age. A pearly transparency of complexion indicates French Creole blood

in her delicate face, but the soft languor of her dove-like eyes and the flash of brilliant color in her cheeks, betray perhaps the slightest tinge of Africa's blood. Though this is scarcely perceptible in Zelma the octoroon, her appearance being that of considerable refinement and her speech educated. The material of her frock, a rich but plain black silk, indicates the indulgence and kindness of her mistress, but its design and cut suggest her station. Without ornament or trimming it fits glove-like her delicate yet Southernly voluptuous figure to the slight waist and from there falls into a skirt that is cut to sou-brette length, disclosing to general observation very handsome ankles clothed in tight white Balbriggan stockings and pretty feet shod in plain black slippers.

A white maid's cap is perched upon her glossy, banded hair, and a maid's white apron brought high upon the corsage of her dress slightly conceals the rounded contours of her figure as it floats in immaculate whiteness down upon the black skirt.

Her dreamy eyes at times light with those gleams that show the slumbering passion with which a drop of torrid blood nearly always fires colder Caucasian streams; though her arms bare to the elbows for the convenience of service in her mistress's chamber are beautifully moulded and of a dazzling, almost ivory, whiteness.

"Nevertheless, you have the opportunity. A ticket for the English steamer and proper funds will be placed quietly in your hands," mutters Martin. "It is rather curious that I who have sometimes been accused of having slave ships among my various ventures should do this abolition act. But you must be aware with your appearance that in some European countries—France, for instance—you might have a better station than the servile one which must always be

yours in this country, and in the South, if you return to it, means your absolute slavery."

"I—I have thought of all these things, Sir," replies the young woman; "I have had many opportunities to run away, but I love Miss Estrella. I cannot let her go alone to that far country. I know she will be kind to me as she always has been." A curious searching look flies into the octoroon's eyes. "What put this idea of defrauding her of my services into your head?" she queries anxiously.

"She. Her generous heart! Estrella wishes for your happiness!" answers the merchant.

"Still she cannot wish to leave me!" The girl's eyes grow troubled. Hearing a loved step in the hallway, she runs out and cries: "Miss Estrella, please come here to me." And Miss Godfrey, dressed for the carriage, coming in, Zelma says to her timidly in wounded voice: "You—you wish to part with me? What have I done to displease you?"

"Nothing, dear Zelma!" answers her mistress. "Only I want to give you a chance in life. In the South you will be a slave."

"Yes, but under your protection, dear mistress, no harm can come to me. I must keep the promise I have made your mother. It was her wish. Don't send me from you when you will need me in that barbarous country."

"My mother's wish," echoes Estrella, quite tenderly. To Martin, she adds: "Please write a paper of manumission for Zelma. I'll sign it."

"Impossible," replies the merchant. "This girl is your father's slave, not yours."

"Under these circumstances," remarks Miss Godfrey, "do you still wish to come with me, Zelma?"

"Yes, dear mistress," answers the bond-maid, devotion in her eyes.

"Then come!" Probably to conceal her emotion, for she has been deeply moved, the young lady passes from the room.

Her maid would follow her, but Martin calls her back. He says: "A word with you," and gives her some explanation of the preparations it will be necessary to make for her mistress for her voyage, adding to this: "I shall write to Mr. Godfrey an explanation of your devotion to his daughter and the reason you have accompanied her. Doubtless it will procure you every consideration at her father's hands."

"Thank you, Sir," answers Zelma gratefully, and courtesying, respectfully stands waiting for his permission to leave the room.

But Martin takes out a cigar abstractedly, lights it and puffs meditatively for a few moments. Then he says tersely: "Do you think, Zelma, Mr. Godfrey ever knew his wife bought you in Louisiana after the death of the maid she had brought with her from Texas?"

"Yes, Sir, I know he did," answers the young woman eagerly, "I remember Mrs. Godfrey saying that he wrote in a letter: 'Tell Zelma when I come to New York if she is devoted to you and baby and wants to marry, I'll give her her freedom.'"

"Humph; and after that?"

"After that my master never wrote anything about me. But that was after he changed so, after he had been wounded in the fight at Rock Springs."

"Changed so? Oh, yes, you mean his writing."

"No, Sir, not exactly. I think his letters were different in spirit or sentiment after that to Mrs. Godfrey. I know they seemed to trouble her. - After receiving one, she often sighed. Though of course she didn't make me her confidant, I imagine she thought her husband didn't love her as he had before. Sometimes I think the sadness caused by these letters rather has-

teued her death. You do not believe Mr. Godfrey's wound can have affected his head?" asks the young woman anxiously.

"Not from his letters," answers the merchant sharply; "there's as good logical business in them as any I ever read. You can go, Zelma. Remember to take good care of your young mistress on the voyage." As the graceful young woman leaves the room, Martin glances after her, and thinks: "Curious, Jim Godfrey doesn't remember he owns such a likely piece of property. Anyway, I'm glad the girl's going. It would have been a great inconvenience sending Estrella without her maid, besides an infernal robbery of Jim Godfrey of a very marketable article worth at least a couple of thousand dollars on the auction block of the Rotunda in the St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans."

Commercial men had some curious ideas of property in those days, and the New York merchant was simply voicing them.

He looks at some letters on the desk in front of him bearing the Galveston post-mark, and thinks grimly: "From his correspondence I don't imagine Jim Godfrey would take kindly to loss of property. Still he never mentions the girl Zelma in his letters, and he keeps a pretty good tag on all his other chattels. Can it be that he has forgotten his wife's purchase in New Orleans?"

Here the cigar drops from the merchant's hands. He springs up hurriedly, runs out into the street and buys a paper; for a newsboy is calling out: "Extra Herald! Great news! War in prospect! The President has ordered the Army of Texas to advance and take possession of the Rio Grande frontier! Will the Greasers stand this?"

"No," mutters Martin to himself, "I'll be hanged if the Greasers stand this. This means a war with Mexico certain as there's a potato famine in Ireland!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN OF TEXAN RANGERS.

A dim misty morning early in March. The three trees, which marked the Galveston Harbor of 1846, are growing indistinct from the deck of the vessel, as the steamer *City of Mobile*, a roomy but light draught craft, suitable to the shallow bays and lagoons of the Texan coast, is paddling over the soft swells of the Gulf of Mexico. She is laden to her bearings with supplies for General Taylor's army. Her forward deck is littered by cases of ammunition, boxes of shells, grape-shot and cannister. Cavalry saddles and casks of commissary bacon and United States salt beef are mixed with a lot of savage government mules, stabled in the bow, a few ambulances and Conestoga wagons being arranged about the beasts to keep them from stampeding. The steerage is crowded with the usual underling riff-raff of an army, sutlers' boys, teamsters, canteen-men and camp followers.

Aft in the cabins, however, congregate commissary officers accompanying the army's supplies of forage and provisions, two or three horse dealers, who have contracts for government mounts, and a scattering of diamond-pinned, white-shirted, egg-nog and mint julep drinking gamblers, who will officiate with Uncle Sam's soldiers on pay-day.

Naturally such a vessel bears very few females, though several lights-o'-love from New Orleans and a couple of well rouged Mobile nymphs are proceeding to Corpus Christi, where about the camp of the American army has grown up a shanty town, which harbors those who prey upon the soldier as well as those who prey upon the Government.

Near the stern of this steamer is seated Miss God-

frey, her bright eyes sometimes fixed on receding Galveston and now and again turned inboard with a rather perturbed expression on her pretty features. She notices the incongruous crowd upon the decks, the rough men and rouged women whose careless language sometimes makes the blood suffuse her face and compels her to turn her eyes again upon the sandy waters dotted with barrel buoys that locate the narrow channel over the Galveston bar.

Though she is unaccompanied, Americans surround her. This gives the unchaperoned girl—for she has left kind hearted Mrs. Rodney behind her in the retreating city—not only respect but privacy. Not one of the free-and-easy men upon the deck says a word to her or even glances unguardedly at her, though she is the prettiest thing upon the steamer. Even the flashily dressed, smooth mannered gamblers from the Mississippi river, who are going down to Corpus Christi to see what they can do at faro and poker with the dashing officers of Taylor's army, or better still to fleece Government contractors with their purses full on United States army contracts, though they cannot help admiring the very stylish and beautiful young lady, would no more approach her with a light word or attempted conversation than they would the wife of the President or the Queen of England.

Miss Godfrey's immunity, however, does not include Zelma, her maid. The slight drop of color in her blood, scarcely observable except by eyes accustomed to discover it, has made Estrella's handsome octoroon the subject not only of careless comments, but to these have been added some rather pointed personal addresses from "Yazoo Sam," as smooth tongued and deadly a gambler as ever handled poker chips.

These attentions coming under her mistress's observation, Miss Godfrey, calling the young woman to her,

says: "Zelma, for this portion of the voyage I can dispense with your personal attendance on deck. You had better remain in your stateroom."

The red blood comes hotly into her attendant's face and tears into her soft dark eyes, and she pouts quite mutinously.

"Don't misunderstand me," goes on her mistress, impulsively. "It is not reproof, Zelma; it is only to save you from insult. But you must obey me."

With this the octoroon dejectedly, thinking of Mr. Yazoo Sam's handsome face and attractive manner, goes to her cabin feeling with the ardor of her one drop of African blood that even for her own good it is very hard to be deprived of the subtle wooing of the Knight of the Faro Table.

Left by herself, Miss Godfrey seated on the vessel's deck grows gloomy; she is so entirely alone; the social ethics of the country she is now in forbidding her making a companion of the girl she has with her.

Her journey from New York to New Orleans under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Rodney had been a very pleasant one. Even from there to Galveston on the *City of Mobile* she had had the companionship of several ladies journeying to join their husbands who were merchants in Galveston or Houston.

But now the vessel, turned down the coast, is steaming towards the Debatable Land, where the wildness of the prairie is made more dangerous by the outrages of guerrilla warfare, where Texan Rangers battle with Mexican banditti, and the Comanche Indian, now that it is spring time, is getting ready to descend from the Pecos Mountains and the Llano Estacado upon the fertile plains of Bexar and the valley of the San Antonio, adding to the horrors of partisan contest the raid of the predatory savage.

The vessel has already made the offing; the pilot has

been dispatched to the shore, when the quick tooting of the steamer's whistle and the sudden pause of her walking-beam makes Miss Godfrey look towards the bow. Another vessel, apparently disabled, as she is traveling under one wheel, very slowly, is passing them, and signals are being exchanged.

Apparently in response to these, the *City of Mobile* remains motionless upon the lazy swell of the gulf. Her paddles do not revolve again until a tugboat is seen steaming out from Galveston to tow the disabled ship into the harbor.

Then Miss Godfrey's vessel steams southward along the low gulf coast of Texas headed for Corpus Christi, some two hundred miles away, where Uncle Sam's soldiers are gathered together; theoretically to occupy and protect Texan soil, but really to be ready to take the initiative and march for the Rio Grande at the first signal from Washington.

As Estrella sits gazing at the shore she would be as gloomy as its low swamps with their moss-grown cypress trees, were not in the girl's mind the happy thought: "Every revolution of the paddle wheels brings me nearer to my father. To-morrow morning Corpus Christi! To-morrow morning, perhaps he will meet me! To-morrow morning, I am in his loved arms!" Her face grows bright as the tropic sun that is now rising, and her eyes as brilliant as the sea now that the mists of the morning are driven from its blue waters.

Into her revery steps Captain McGowan, the most genial skipper who sailed the Gulf of Mexico. Those who travelled the California trip in the Fifties remember McGowan. In white duck from "keel to kelsen," as he expresses it, he looks as immaculate "as a thousand bale Louisiana planter."

In answer to the young lady's inquiries—they have

become quite friends in the two days from New Orleans to Galveston—the skipper tells her that the vessel that has passed them is the *Paducah* of the same line bound up; that she has broken her shaft and is two days behind her schedule time.

“Oh, goodness,” cries Estrella anxiously. “There may be a letter on board of her from my father. You know I am going to Corpus Christi to meet papa. From there he will take me up to his hacienda, Live Oaks.”

“Yes, through a country with land pirates at every turn,” mutters McGowan. Then he continues earnestly: “My dear young lady, I have been thinking about you ever since you came on board again at Galveston. You had better let me keep you on my ship at Corpus Christi, and when I sail take you back with me. The land you’re going to isn’t fit for human beings, let alone a delicate girl like you.”

“That will be impossible! I have come here to see my father; to be by his side in his old age. My loved father is waiting for me!” cries the girl devotedly.

“Well, love will make women go anywhere. There are a few young officers’ wives even now down at Corpus Christi, who want the last kiss of their boy husbands before they bid them good-bye for the campaign, perhaps the last they will ever give ’em,” replies the skipper moodily. “But in this matter, since you are determined to land, Miss Godfrey, permit me as commander of this craft, to take a liberty.”

“Certainly, Captain. I know anything you do will be for my good.” Estrella looks at him with grateful eyes.

“Then,” replies the seaman, “heave anchor here. I’ll join you in a minute.”

A few moments later he returns accompanied by a gentleman, and says: “Miss Godfrey, permit me to

introduce to you Captain Hampton. There's no man better fitted to put you safely in your dad's arms."

"Captain Hampton!" ejaculates the girl, her eyes growing big. "Not the——" Rising, she is about to continue excitedly, when noticing the almost boyish young fellow who is standing, sombrero in hand, before her, she suddenly checks herself with a slightly embarrassed laugh and responds to the polite yet modest bow of the gentleman before her.

"I'll leave you to make his acquaintance," says McGowan cheerily. "Seasickness is about the only thing that ever downed Hampton. He's no great shakes on shipboard, and made the voyage from New Orleans with us to Galveston between blankets. But on land he is a screamer."

"This salt water business for a day or two made me feel about as worthless as if I had been scalped," remarks the young man diffidently. "However, I'm in the saddle again. Noticing that you are alone on the boat," he continues in easier tone, "I have taken the liberty of asking Captain McGowan to introduce me. He tells me you insist on venturing to visit your father up in Bexar County. Can I take the greater liberty of asking your plans to get there?"

"Certainly," replies the young lady gratefully. "At Corpus Christi, I am directed to go to the branch office of Martin, Best & Co. There I hope to meet my father, who will take me with him up to his rancho of Live Oaks. It's above the Aranzas."

"Ah, yes, on Atascosa Creek near the Nueces, where cattle thieves, Mexican smugglers and sometimes Comanches ride." The young man reflectively chews a straw she notices he has in his mouth, and adds: "I have not seen your father for the last few years. You—you'll excuse me, Miss, but Jim Godfrey can hardly be right in his mind to think of taking a delicate

girl like you to such a place now that a general war with Mexico is about to break out upon the whole border."

"True," replies Miss Godfrey, concern in her voice, "Mr. Martin, his New York agent, told me ever since the fight at Rock Springs my father's letters indicate he has changed very much, but still Mr. Martin always said they were as full of horse sense as if he were General Sam Houston himself. You—you've seen my father. Tell me, was he not always rational?"

"Yes, after he recovered from that fight at Rock Springs," returns Hampton, "more than rational, long-headed, astute and energetic. Still, of course, a desperate scrimmage like that one, together with what he went through afterwards, may have told upon him eventually."

"You—you know the details of that awful fight, where my father was the only one who escaped!" says Estrella very eagerly. "Papa never wrote mother much about it."

"That was a good while ago," returns Hampton, "and there were so many little brushes just before our big fights at Alamo and Goliad and San Jacinto that one more or less didn't count for much. Your father escaped alive. At that time there were a good many skirmishes in which everybody was rubbed out." As if to turn Miss Godfrey's mind from this subject, he glances at the very fashionable garments of the young lady and observes rather abruptly: "From your appearance, you've been away from Texas for some time, I reckon?"

"Yes, ever since I was three years of age. I have never seen my father to remember him." Her voice is very eager as she asks: "Tell me, do I look like him?"

"Not a bit!" answers the Captain decidedly.

"I don't look like my father!" pouts the girl disappointedly.

"But still you do look like someone I've seen," returns the Texan meditatively. His piercing eyes regard Miss Godfrey so searchingly that to break away from the subject, she goes into a rambling record of her life; how her father had gone to Texas in 1824, having received, as an *impresario*, an immense grant of land from the Mexican Government on condition that he furnish it with a hundred settlers. This contract he had not been able to complete until 1834, though he had long before that time located his hacienda on the fertile lands between the Atascosa Creek and San Antonio River. That while making this settlement, her little sister, Sybil, two years younger than she, had been stolen and carried away either by Mexican bandits or Comanche Indians.

"Yes, such things have been too common about here," returns the Texan. "Though it may have Lippians and Wacos, those savages then hadn't been taught to be good Indians by our Kentucky rifles."

"Sometimes," continues Estrella, "I imagine, though he never mentioned it in his letters, it is some wild hope of finding my sister that has kept my father all these years from visiting New York and taking me in his arms."

Noting how the girl's face lights up as she says this, Hampton suggests: "You seem so eager to see him, permit me to expedite the meeting by getting you early on shore to-morrow morning and taking you to the office of Martin, Best & Co."

"Thank you," replies the girl unaffectedly, "I shall be more than pleased if a friend of Captain McGowan will be kind enough to see me that far upon the way."

As they have been talking, Estrella has been looking over the gentleman whose escort she has accepted and

is pleased with him, though she thinks he is rather young to be of any great weight or importance in this rough and tumble Western world.

He has a boy's face, clean cut and Roman, lighted by gray-blue eyes, that would seem cold did they not sparkle enthusiastically as they gaze on her; a symmetrical figure, though rather gaunt and wiry from the athletics of the prairie, exceedingly small feet and hands. Dressed in a black long-skirted frock coat, the typical Southern low-collared vest and an immaculately white shirt, with trousers well spread out over his high Wellington boots, a Mexican sombrero shading his clean shaven face, the young man's air would be that of a rather bashful farm lad addressing a society beauty, did not a curious courtesy of manner add a quiet and almost impressive dignity to his bearing.

"Thank you," he replies simply. "You have made me very happy in trusting yourself so far to me. I think even on this boat I may be of some little assistance to you."

"Indeed, how?" asks the young lady, astonished.

"I noticed that you seemed inconvenienced sitting on deck this morning without the attendance of your maid to fan you and make you comfortable. If you will permit me, I will speak to a certain gentleman, and I think after that you can tell your girl that she can come on deck."

"Oh, please don't make any trouble."

"There will be no trouble. I will simply say to Mr. Yazoo Sam that any attention to her maid annoys Miss Godfrey. That will, I think, settle it."

"But please don't place yourself in danger," whispers the girl in a frightened tone. "These Mississippi gamblers, I believe, are——"

"Are rather slick with the pistol," he smiles coldly.

"Yes, but other people about here are also quick on the trigger."

"Yes, I suppose they have to be to live," she shudders; then to change the subject remarks in rather embarrassed tone: "When first Captain McGowan mentioned your name as Hampton, do you know I thought, till I noticed how boyish you were, that he was perhaps introducing the celebrated Captain Sharpe Selby Hampton of Hays's Texan Rangers, the noted frontiersman and Indian fighter, who even as a boy fought at San Jacinto. Are you a relative of his?"

"Yes, I'm—I'm a connection," stammers the young man very nervously. "But if you'll excuse me, I'll—I'll execute the little mission I have given myself, so that your girl can come on deck."

He hurriedly leaves her, and Estrella, watching him anxiously, sees him step to three or four gentlemen of the dice box and card table who are lounging amidships and they all lift their hats to him. He says a few quiet words, and Mr. Yazoo Sam answers, his manner implying dissent or refusal.

Then the girl starts astounded. The cold eyes of this bashful boy gleam with a peculiar steely glint that frightens her; a look flies into his face that awes her. She seems to be in the presence of death. Half a dozen cold words apparently issue slowly from his thin chiseled lips, and the gambler shrinks from him; then shrugging his shoulders deprecatingly, bows and responds in louder tone: "No offence meant and no harm done, we hope, Captain. To prove it, let's liquor!" With this they all go forward, apparently to the bar-room of the steamer that is doing a great business.

A few minutes after Miss Godfrey steps to the state-room and tells Zelma that she can come on deck without fear of annoyance. This proves to be so. Mr.

Yazoo Sam does not address her maid, and the rest of the morning passes quite pleasantly, Miss Godfrey making herself acquainted with the "Indian Question" in one of Cooper's novels.

At two o'clock Captain McGowan makes his appearance at her side and suggests: "With your permission, young lady, I'll take you in to dinner."

Entering the cabin, she finds the skipper has given her retirement at his own table, only a sedate army contractor and two commissariat officers in uniform being of the party, with the addition of the gentleman whose acquaintance she has made in the morning. He shortly after comes in and seats himself on McGowan's other hand.

Towards the end of the meal the contractor and commissary men, being about to leave the table to light their cigars on deck, the skipper turning to Hampton, says: Hope you and this young lady have had a pleasant chat together."

"Decidedly!" answers the gentleman enthusiastically. Miss Godfrey was kind enough to tell me about the great city of New York, life at Saratoga Springs, and give me some description of the high-fly civilization, upon the trail of which I got at New Orleans."

"You've been up at the Crescent City, Captain?" remarks one of the commissary officers, as he rises from his chair.

"Yes, getting equipment for the boys," replies Hampton, a tinge of embarrassment in his voice. "You know we expect to move very shortly."

"Yes, when I was last at Corpus Christi, Ben McCulloch told me that you were going to take over Sam Walker's company," remarks the army man. "Also that Colonel Hays had written to you in New Orleans telling you to leave all extra equipment at Corpus

Christi and the regiment would get it when they reach there."

"By George, that looks as if General Taylor was about to move at once," interjects McGowan.

"Sam Walker's becoming its lieutenant colonel will probably give you the vacant majority in the Texas regiment, won't it, Captain Hampton?" asks the army contractor.

"Can't exactly be sure of that," replies the young fellow. "Some people think I'm too young." Here his glance happens to catch the young lady seated at McGowan's side, her face, made red yet bewitching by embarrassment, directed at some raisins upon her plate. He mutters blushing: "Thank you, gentlemen, I'll accept your invitation and join you in a cigar," and hurriedly leaves the cabin ahead of the commissariat men.

"What's the matter with Sharpe Hampton?" queries McGowan of his pretty charge. "He always was a bashful fellow, but to-day he seems to excel himself. He accepted those army chaps' cigars when they didn't offer them."

"I'm afraid," says Miss Godfrey, still studying the raisins on her plate, "that Captain Hampton is perhaps displeased with me. I made a very embarrassing and foolish contretemps. I told him I had nearly mistaken him for the celebrated Captain Sharpe Hampton, but that of course he was too young." Then she breaks out, her eyes growing big: "Is that boy really the great frontiersman, the friend of the celebrated Colonel Jack Hays of the Texas Rangers, and Ben McCulloch, and the hero of half a hundred hand to hand encounters with Mexicans and Indians?"

"Yes, that's Captain Sharpe Selby Hampton," replies the skipper. To this he adds in low chuckle: "By Jove, you've probably wounded Sharpe Hampton

more savagely than half a dozen regiments of Greasers could. The only thing he is touchy upon is his youthful appearance."

"But isn't he a boy?"

"Well, he's twenty-six. About the age Napoleon fought his great Italian campaigns, I believe. And between you and me, Captain Sharpe Selby Hampton, though he's as modest as he is brave, is able enough and experienced enough to take care of anything in the fighting line, from grizzly bears to Comanche Indians; though in other respects he is a very timid young fellow, as you've doubtless seen. Blushed to the eyes, didn't he, as he addressed you? Come," the seaman says cheerfully, "I'll make your peace with him. Nobody could be very angry with *you*." Leading the young lady on deck, he finds the young Texan meditatively smoking a cigar.

"I see I've got to make this introduction over again," remarks McGowan. "Miss Godfrey, this is really Captain Sharpe Selby Hampton, the comrade of Jack Hays and Ben McCulloch, the hero of half a hundred skirmishes, the boy who with 'Deaf Smith' destroyed the bridge at San Jacinto."

"Now quit, McGowan," says the young man, uneasily, tossing his cigar away, his face growing red notwithstanding its tan.

"The Greaser killer, the Injun scalper!" guffaws the jovial seadog.

"Please hold your horses!" says Hampton. "I never put my knife about an Indian's top-knot, though I've been tempted to. What man in Texas hasn't? But you'll frighten Miss Godfrey; frighten her of me, when—when I had hoped to be perhaps of some little service to her."

"Oh, that you have already been!" cries the girl gratefully. "The attendance of my maid has been very

useful to me." She glances at the Texan Ranger and sees something in his countenance that makes her turn her eyes diffidently over the blue waves gliding by the steamer's side.

"By Jingo, you're the bashful one now, Miss Estrella," laughs McGowan, "but I must relieve my first officer and give him a chance for dinner."

The commander of the boat walks forward leaving Miss Godfrey still gazing out upon the waters of the Gulf.

"You look all—all fired warm," stammers the Texan nervously. "Let me get your girl to come and fan you."

"Pooh, I don't need to be fanned all the time," laughs the young lady. "Please place a steamer chair for me. Then will you tell me something of the land of my birth that I am visiting but which I know so little about?"

"Will mustangs kick?" replies Hampton eagerly, and though lacking in experience, he shows the instinct of a cavalier by making Miss Godfrey very comfortable. Seated beside her, and perhaps inspired by her exquisite face or by his subject, for the land of Texas seems dear to him, the young man tells his lovely vis-à-vis the beauties of the Lone Star State, describing the wave-like plains green with the richest grasses and covered with myriads of buffalo. From this he runs into a picture of the most lovely thing in all that southern country, the flower prairie, that sea of dazzling colors dotted here and there with mottes of timber that look like green islands in a gorgeous ocean. He explains that these are often so vast in extent that only the tried frontiersmen dare attempt to cross them without compass, for the inexperienced get lost upon them, and traveling in circles mid the flowery billows, become as helpless as if alone in an open boat upon the bound-

less ocean, sinking down to die of thirst, the odors of a million petals regaling their expiring nostrils and their dying ears soothed with the songs of innumerable humming birds and orange winged orioles. Enthusing over the wonderful game that covers this fair land, he tells his listener of hunting adventures with buffalo, cougars and also the savage jaguar of Southern Texas.

During this Miss Godfrey notices that he is only eloquent upon the pleasant things of the country she is visiting; that he says naught of the frightful combats by men over this beautiful land, of the rattlesnakes that lie coiled beneath its wild flowers, or of the merciless Indians that raid its green prairies with lance and scalping knife.

But in the midst of his oration, the Captain suddenly starts and says disconcertedly: "Thunder, that's the gong for supper."

"Yes, the time has passed very rapidly and very pleasantly, hasn't it?" remarks the girl. To this she adds as she rises: "Thank you for trying to make me like Texas. You've even made death in its flower prairies poetic."

"Well, yes," he replies uneasily, "I love my State and I want you to like it also. It's your State too."

But his disciple in frontier instruction going off to her cabin, he stands gazing after her graceful figure. To himself he mutters sheepishly: "That's the first occasion I ever jabbered poetic nothings."

Soon after pacing the deck and attempting philosophy by the aid of a cigar, he is joined by the genial skipper of the *City of Mobile*. "I hope you will be able to assist the young lady when she lands," remarks McGowan, "down in that ruddy, muddy, cut-throat hole, Corpus Christi, to-morrow morning."

"Believe me, I shall do what I can for her," responds the Texan.

"You found her somewhat like her father, I presume?" suggests the skipper.

"No more than a canary bird is like a blue jay, I'm very happy to say," is Hampton's reply. "For between ourselves, Jim Godfrey has the reputation of being a very onery cuss all over Southern Texas, working his niggers to death and skinning everybody who has dealings with him. But his daughter—whew! As the Arkansas traveler said, 'she is chicken fixings.'" The Ranger's eyes are very enthusiastic.

"Oh, so you do think well of my protégé?"

"Well, I thought enough of her two or three hours ago to risk my life by telling Yazoo Sam, who they say shoots mighty straight, that if he didn't quit sparking Miss Godfrey's yaller gal, I'd put daylight through him to-morrow morning as soon as we landed," answers the young man. "You see it annoyed Miss Godfrey just a leetle and I couldn't stand that. No Siree! Not by Texas!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIGHT FOR THE DESERT SPRING.

In 1846 on an ocean steamer on the Gulf Coast, what was called "supper" was nearly always a pleasant meal. This evening the breeze was blowing softly through the open transoms of the *City of Mobile*, the bright lights of the salon made the cabin cheerful, and the languid splash of the waters outside under the paddles of the boat seemed to be a pleasant lullaby.

The menu was excellent, but Miss Godfrey noticed that the Captain of the Texan Rangers, who came in considerably after she did and sat opposite her, said very little and ate perhaps less.

So much so, that McGowan, who announces that they will be in Corpus Christi early in the morning, remarks "Still seasick, eh, Captain Hampton? You have too delicate a stomach for salt water cooking. You should take a lesson in gastronomy from this young lady at my right hand. She can handle a knife and fork in a gale of wind." This is quite true. Miss Godfrey somehow is in excellent spirits this evening and is doing full justice to a very good meal.

"No romance in her appetite," continues the skipper cheerily. Turning to his fair protégé, he suggests: "Have another plate of waffles, won't you?"

"Thank you," laughs Estrella. "After that can I support your eulogy of my appetite with some of that buffalo tongue in front of you?"

"With pleasure. This evening Hampton will explain to you how they shoot these critters out on the plains."

"I think I've told you that already," responds the Texan, glancing across the table, but the bright eyes of his exquisite vis-a-vis make him seek his plate again, though they don't increase his appetite.

For some occult reason the more beautiful Miss Godfrey appears to him, the gloomier and more distraught this Captain of Rangers. Accustomed to the dangers of partisan warfare with savage enemies, he seems to be almost afraid of gazing on the ethereal loveliness of the lady, which this evening is pronounced enough to conquer more blasé gentlemen than the young fellow seated opposite to her. Though extremely cool-headed when facing almost inevitable death, Sharpe has grown very warm-blooded in encountering the dashing light artillery of Estrella's brown eyes. This evening he thinks Miss Godfrey is beautiful enough to conquer anything that walks.

Perhaps judging it is her last opportunity for some

little time to wear the delicate garments of fashionable life, this summery evening Estrella is all in white, her perfectly formed shoulders and rounded arms gleaming like ivory beneath the sheer muslins of her corsage. Zelma has bound up her hair à la Greque, but artfully destroyed classic severity by permitting two or three ringlets to escape and dangle upon the snowy neck. This is not absolutely Attic style, but it suits Captain Hampton "down to the ground," as he mentally expresses it.

Noticing his almost rustic embarrassment, McGowan, who as a popular steamboat captain, has witnessed many salt water flirtations, mercilessly remarks: "Perhaps after dinner you will find something pleasanter than buffalo to chat about to Miss Godfrey. You know he has had some experience," he continues to the young lady. "He is a little seasick now, but upon dry land, I am told, he is a frontier gallant, and you can bet it's true. I never saw a fighter who wasn't a lover."

"It isn't quite fair, Captain, to jump on a seasick man," returns Hampton. He rises uneasily and mutters: "In fact, I—I guess this cabin's too hot for me. I'll—I'll go on deck and take a cigar."

A slight laugh, in which Estrella herself cannot help joining, hastens his abrupt exodus from the table.

"That fellow," chuckles the Captain, "is more dangerous than he looks. Colonel Jack Hays, who's traveled with me, tells me Hampton dances the fandango so well that the hombres in San Antonio snap their yellow teeth like castanets, and the señoritas down on the Rio Grande think he is the prettiest caballero who ever straddled a bucking mustang. You want to look out for him, Miss Godfrey."

"Ah, then you should not have placed me in his charge, Captain McGowan," laughs Estrella, parrying

his suggestion with that woman's tact which is given even to debutantes. "You must remember that I've only been out one season and am not accustomed to meet gentlemen who they say fight like Paladins."

"Oh, I'd risk you; its Sharpe I'm scared about," answers the Captain. "Besides, soon as we get to Corpus Christi, that chap who is smoking his cigar on deck will have rivals. The dashing bucks of Taylor's Army will be about you like bees round a honey tree."

To this the young lady doesn't answer. It reminds her of young Pelham and the souvenir he had taken from her at Saratoga. She knows the lieutenant rides with May's Dragoons; that perhaps to-morrow she will see his handsome figure and earnest eyes. But as she steps on deck with McGowan she puts this from her mind with a careless: "Pshaw, he must have forgotten me long ago scouting on the plains."

As she and the skipper pace together the port side of the hurricane deck, the Texan strides the starboard side. Rather chewing his cigar than smoking it, he is pondering on a subject that disturbs him. Miss Godfrey is the first highly accomplished and delicately bred Anglo-Saxon young lady he has ever met. Uncouth though comely trappers' daughters he has seen quite often. With the semi-civilized beauties of the coquettish *rebozo* and floating *nagua* that abound on the Mexican border, he has oft footed the cachucha to the disgust of their compatriots, but this Eastern belle with her cultivated graces of mind and body is something he has never met before. Though in his short and only visit to New Orleans, from which he is returning, he had looked at the Louisiana beauties, it had only been distantly from a seat in the opera house or theatre. Estrella's very delicacy and refinement make him extremely diffident. He says to himself grimly: "Miss High Flyer doubt-

less thinks me a mixture of uncultured frontier lad and blood-thirsty bravo," but gazes earnestly across the deck at the delicate beauty that is almost fairylike in the moonlight.

Catching a glance from the girl's bright eyes, he recklessly tosses his cigar away and walks straight as the moth to the flame to Miss Godfrey, who has been left by McGowan seated on a steamer chair under the stern awning.

With that curious abruptness common to bashful men he remarks: "I have been thinking about your father, Miss Godfrey."

"Oh, thank you for coming to talk to me about him," replies the girl eagerly and cordially. "Tell me everything you know of him, Captain Hampton. You seemed this morning to rather avoid speaking of him." Her delicate hand and her almost pleading eyes indicate the camp stool beside her.

The next second he is seated quite close to her, saying earnestly: "Only because I hesitated to mention to you a scene in his life that must greatly affect his daughter. As a matter of fact, the only time I ever really was with Jim Godfrey for more than a passing hour was just after that extraordinary little Indian-Mexican skirmish, from which your father was the only one who escaped alive."

"Yes, the only one," answers the girl, her voice quivering. "Tell me. You could not have been there. He was the only one who lived."

"Not there at the time, but mighty shortly afterwards," answers the ranger; "and if you do not think it will disturb your nerves too much, I will tell you about it as well as I am able. I was only a boy of fifteen then. But there are certain scenes that get branded upon a man's memory.

"Early in 1836, I, in company with a small band of

Texans, was sent to scout on the upper waters of the Guadalupe. There were but few of us. Most of those who bore arms were getting ready on the lower San Antonio and about Goliad to meet the expected invasion of Santa Anna from Mexico. For in the previous December, we had answered old Ben Milam's cry and avenged his blood in storming San Antonio, and sending General Cos hustling across the Rio Grande to tell his master Santa Anna that he and fifteen hundred Mexican regulars had been driven out of the chief town in Texas by some three hundred frontiersmen unaided by artillery and only armed with rifles, pistols and Arkansas toothpicks.

"Almost as soon as Cos was squelched, Colonel Travis, who was in command at San Antonio, ordered some ten of us to patrol the sources of the Guadalupe. He feared that some Mexican column might sneak in back of us from Chihuahua, and cut us off from the main Texan force which was all too slowly assembling at Gonzales.

"For a few days we scouted upon and examined the head waters of that river reaching the tag end of those barren plains that in New Mexico are called the Llano Estacado and come down in Middle Texas almost to the Rio Grande. Though the country is not quite as barren there as it is further up, springs are mighty few and far between, and upon the sundried mesa getting enough water for man and beast is about as hard as trapping coyotes.

"Our work had to be done very carefully for we were upon the borders of the Indian country and while we were looking for Mexicans, might be surprised and jumped on by Comanches. So we all kept our eyes mighty wide open.

"One morning, just at the border of this bad land, Jake Littell and I came on, to our astonishment, among

the piñon timber about the base of some outlying butes, a trail. Though the imprints were those of moccasins, we knew that no Indian feet had made 'em; because they turned outward. Tracking this for about an hour, we overtook a crazy white man dressed in store clothes. He was raving with delirium from the hot sun, his tongue black as a watermelon-seed from lack of water.

"On seeing us, he uttered a shriek and fled from us. Being mounted, we rapidly overtook him, seized him, poured water down his throat and gave him the best succor possible out on the prairie.

"After drinking our canteens dry, he revived sufficiently to tell us that he and a party of five others had had a brush with a band of Mexican volunteer cavalry somewhere to the south of us.

"By this time, the balance of the command had overtaken us. 'Greasers to the South!' was passed along. We were not accustomed to count noses in those days, and we didn't ask 'how many?' Taking the man with us, who was still at times so delirious we had to tie him on an extra pack mule, we started off on one of the most terrific jaunts I have ever ridden. Even in February, the vegetation was parched upon that arid plain. Of course we had taken the precaution to fill our canteens when we left the last little creek that trickled down the escarpment to join the Guadalupe, for we guessed water would be almighty scarce upon the Mesa. As we rode on, the burning sun over head seemed to blister us. It was the hottest winter day I have ever seen in Texas and would have been a broiler even in the middle of summer. Not a breath of air was stirring over the arid table land; and mighty soon our mustangs began to suffer. But stimulated by the hope of wiping out the rancheros, we travelled one whole day and

part of the next. By this time we were beginning to think not of Mexican cavalry, but of water to keep us alive. Already two or three of the pack mules had given up and thrown themselves down upon the baked adobe soil to die. The veteran frontiersman, in command of us, had a very gloomy look upon his gaunt visage as he rode along, chewing some tasajo to get a little saliva in his mouth. In fact, those of us who were not chewing jerked beef, were chewing bullets to keep our tongues from swelling till they choked us.

"Just then a little breeze, the first that had fanned us, sprang up from the west.

"Littell, who was riding beside me, chancing to gaze over the cactus plain, suddenly cried: 'Golly, look at them mules that we've left behind us! Boys, we're saved!' For the two mules that had given up and were lying down, had staggered to their feet and were loping off towards the west, new life in them.

"All animals have an instinct for water, but a mule can scent it farther than a buzzard can see a carcass. Littell knew this and he implored our captain to follow them. 'I've seen 'em, boys, run seven hours clean off the trail and find water. For God's sake, git after 'em,' he implored to our commander. So we tore helter skelter after the mules.

"The Mexican cavalry might be south of us, but we were so thirsty we thought only that a spring might be within reach of us.

"So our horses loped and staggered along for two hours, when the mules ran plump into a spring of living water. I could no more have held my bronco from going into it than I could have held a cannon ball from one of those eighteen-pounder guns down at Corpus Christi.

"As our mustangs sprang in we jumped off them, an' man and beast drank together like mad.

"I had scarce filled myself, and I think I took about a gallon, when Littell clapped me on the shoulder and whispered: 'Sharpe, look! See what's about us.'

"Just then several of our men uttered hoarse cries. I sprang up and saw that we had ridden into the scene of an almighty tough scrimmage, but had been so crazed for water we hadn't noticed it. Dead men lay all about that spring, some in the uniforms of the Mexican lancers, some in the buckskin of the trapper, and one dressed in store clothes, though he wore high boots and leggings.

"'Ready, boys, Injuns!' cried our leader.

"'Indians? I don't see any,' I half laughed. Out on the plain there was no cover save a gully half a mile away, full of mesquite brush and prickly cactus.

"'Injuns, sure,' said Littell. 'Look, ye little greenhorn. Every dead man lying around here, Greaser or American, *has been scalped.*'

"Like a streak we were in the saddle and reconnoitred that plain mighty carefully, though we kept half a dozen men about the spring, for we knew that would be the vital point in a long fight. The crowd that had water must whip.

"All our scouts returned in the course of an hour or two and said no Indians' signs in sight, except the trail of a big Comanche war party that had apparently travelled out to the northwest, probably two days before.

"So we went to doing the Christian act by the dead Americans. The Greasers we left to their friends, the vultures. Though we examined the ground carefully, and even the mesquite chaparral, not a sign of dead Indian could we find about. The four men—there were five Americans in all—were known to some of our command as buffalo hunters. The man in store

clothes was utterly unknown to any of us. He was probably some mining prospector or speculator in lands, because the only things we could find in his pockets were two or three lumps of black stuff, the boys allowed must be coal, and a surveyor's chain and compass. I suppose the varmints left them fearing the instruments were 'Bad Medicin.' Everything else had been taken from him by the Indians except one of those little golden circles that I've seen on so many dead men's breasts after a fight. The boys don't like to look at them. Those who know what they mean never tell. Even tough old Littell turned his head away when he saw that golden sign on the dead man's body."

"Is it like—like this one?" asks Miss Godfrey, producing the little circle which nearly two years before in Saratoga had perturbed the great United States Senator.

"Exactly!" returns the Texan after he has examined it by the light coming from the open window of the cabin. "Where did you get this?" he asks curiously.

"It was one my mother brought with her from Texas. She said my father wore it when I was a little girl."

"Yes, many of those who have come to us from the United States have worn 'em," remarks Hampton. "Most people in Texas don't like to talk about 'em, but I reckon they are the sign of some great secret society, probably only political in its ends, certainly not criminal, for some of the bravest and noblest men who have fallen in battle for Texas have borne that symbol."

"But to go on with my story," he continues. "As we journeyed down the Guadalupe, the man we had found in the butes gradually got back his senses. During this, from the broken words he gave to us from time to time, I put up the combat around that

Rock Springs—that's what they call it now—about in this peculiar and weird way.

“That spring of living water, twenty Mexican lancers, scouting from the direction of Eagle Pass and the Rio Grande, had taken possession of. The six Texans coming from the other way, their horses worn out by heat and thirst, themselves made desperate by want of water—had attacked. For apparently the fight had been made by the twenty Greasers to keep the six Americans from getting a taste of that spring. The combat had been hand to hand; desperate, bloody. Pistols against lances, rifles against escopetas, and bowie knives against machetes. Our crowd had won, butchered the rancheros to a man though all of the Americans had been killed except the crazy fellow we were bringing back with us. But here's the curious part of it. While this combat was going on, fifty Indians in war paint, coming over the plain, had looked grimly at it until Greaser and white man had gone down together, and then had quietly ridden in and scalped the dead, made ready for their devilment. But by some trick of the frontier or act of Providence they had missed this one man who had flown before them and somehow escaped and got down into the butes where we had found him just in time to save his life.

“This I figured out from the position of the bodies and accoutrements and a few wandering horses saddled and bridled that we found grazing near the spring.

“As we returned down the Guadalupe, gradually the man recovered his senses and became known to us by the papers on him; so we took him back to where he belonged, the great hacienda of Live Oaks below San Antonio. Here a new horror put all his brains back into him, for we found the adobe buildings had been gutted by General Cos and his Greasers in his retreat, and

every head of livestock and every nigger run off, and every man upon it massacred. There was no more life at the hacienda of Live Oaks than there had been life at the lone spring upon the mesa one hundred and fifty miles away, except a dog, the man called Pinto, who came to him and licked his hand. For the crazy demented fugitive we had picked up in the butes was Jim Godfrey—your father.”

“I had guessed this,” whispers Estrella sadly. “How he must have suffered!” Then she continues in anxious tone: “You—you’re quite sure that his mind was not permanently affected in any way?”

“Certainly,” returns the Captain decidedly. “Your dad’s very misfortunes seemed to give new life and energy to him. The moment he discovered everyone was dead about the plantation, that it had been entirely destroyed, the vigor of a man who will not be crushed seemed to come into him. Even while we rangers stood about the ruined hacienda, your father with indomitable nerve, was already taking measures to build it up again. Without assistance, he dug up from a place where it had been concealed in the masonry of the building, a chest containing not only his business papers but a large quantity of money in United States gold. For a very little while, I think, he had an idea of taking this money and leaving the plantation and going back to the States, but that was only for an hour or two. Even when our scouts came in and reported that the Mexicans had run off every nigger and killed every white man on the plantation, and that there was not a living thing within forty miles of us except wild animals, your father had made up his mind to rebuild. I heard him say to Littell: ‘Five hundred thousand acres is a principality, why shouldn’t I stay and hold it?’

"Four years from that time, chancing to be on a scout on the Atascosa with Hays's Rangers, I visited Live Oaks. I found it rebuilt. A lot of new niggers purchased in Louisiana were at work in the fields. More white settlers brought from the States had joined your father. Determined not to have it destroyed again, Jim Godfrey had fortified the rancho and armed it. In proof of this to-day the Hacienda of Live Oaks is the only inhabited station between San Antonio and Corpus Christi with the exception of the cabin of one family of life-in-their-hand trappers who live near Aransas Bay. Your father's great trouble will be to get you to his rancho safely. But probably he has brought enough of his followers with him to make your journey comparatively secure, especially as Taylor's projected movement to the Rio Grande will occupy all the Mexican forces."

"Ah, you make me very happy," replies his listener, her eyes beaming. "Every word you have uttered has proclaimed my father's devotion to me. Even with his great losses and destroyed estate, he within a year afterwards sent sufficient money for my mother's and my comfort in New York and soon after enough for even my luxury."

"Very well, then let's take the trail to livelier topics," suggests the Captain. "The darkies are singing some plantation melodies in the steerage. Would you like to hear them?" for sounds of the banjo are floating over the soft and quiet waters.

"With pleasure," remarks the young lady, and under his escort strolls forward to listen to "Oh, Susannah," "Nellie Grey," and "The Arkansas Traveller," and see a big darkey roustabout from Louisiana do a terrific double shuffle Levee dance on the hurricane deck.

"You like music?" she asks the Captain.

"Well, yes, possibly because I've heard so very little of it. You know I never listened to an opera until I went into the Academy in New Orleans. There was a soul in that melody which made my eyes water and I'm not considered about here by the Greasers particularly chicken hearted. Italian music about a troubadour."

"Ah! Like to hear some Italian melodies to-night?"

"From—from your lips?"

"Oh, I'm not a prima donna, but I think I know some of the songs from *Il Trovatore* you listened to that evening in New Orleans."

Miss Godfrey steps into the cabin and gives some directions to her maid.

A few moments after as she and the Captain are seated near the stern of the boat, Zelma brings to her mistress a guitar.

Then Hampton, as he expresses it to himself, "hears the band begin to play," and thinks that Miss Godfrey, singing sweet Italian love songs in the moonlight, beats the New Orleans prima donnas all to flinders.

"At all events, her melodies make me lunny," cogitates the Texan after the young lady has gone away to her cabin. Then he abruptly mutters: "Where in thunder have I seen her features?"

Lighting a cigar he paces the deck, turning the thing over in his mind. Finally he concludes it is so long ago he cannot locate it. Yet even after he has turned in, as he lies in his berth, Miss Godfrey's radiant features will come back to him.

"The face I remember was of course, not so pretty as hers. Jumping mustangs, nothing could be as pretty as hers!" he thinks half dreamily, as he tosses on the pillow. Suddenly he gives a start, shudders slight-

ly, and mutters: "Snakes and 'gators, have I gone daft? By the Eternal, the face that looked like hers *had been scalped!*"

BOOK II.

TAYLOR'S CAMP AT CORPUS CHRISTI.

CHAPTER V.

THE MARCH FOR THE RIO GRANDE.

The next morning Miss Godfrey wakes to find the steamer anchored in the bay of Corpus Christi. A dozen other vessels are about the *City of Mobile*, among them, two small gun boats and a revenue cutter. To her astonishment she sees they all have steam up. The bustle of an army getting ready for active service is on the water as well as on the land. The orderly lines of white tents and log cabins of four thousand U. S. Regulars, three or four batteries of artillery, the light guns placed in position, the heavy guns parked at the rear, are in full view. As *Estrella* steps on deck the reveille sounding from half a dozen fife and drum corps comes faintly over the water. The flag is being hoisted on the headquarters flagstaff. The whole glorious panoply of war is in front of her. She can see the infantry companies forming in the canvas-bordered streets though there are no signs of the usual morning drill.

In contrast to the extreme order of the military encampment, outside its lines on the lower ground nearer the shore, stands a disreputable shanty town of adobe huts, clapboard houses and even dwellings made of

mesquite boughs and branches, and Conestoga wagons that have become houses on wheels, its irregular streets filled with the refuse of that shiftless congregation which always clusters about an army in its winter quarters. For Taylor's forces have occupied Corpus Christi for nearly five months, ample time to gather about his well-ordered command not only those on direct business for the Government bringing him supplies, forage and ammunition, but also the thousand varied sharks and harpies that live upon, prey upon and plunder Uncle Sam's soldiers. Consequently in this heterogeneous congregation of buildings are seen Mexican dance halls, with painted canvas signs, American gambling-houses and bar-rooms where aguardiente, mescal and "noyau" together with bad whiskey that never saw Kentucky, are served in sufficient quantities to make the duties of the provost marshal very arduous after pay-day. Of course, mingled with the haunts of vice are the sirens who lure the soldiers into them.

The appearance of this shanty town is made somewhat picturesque by the green of the bough manufactured huts and the varied patched covers of the Conestoga wagons, some of which are occupied as homes by wandering camp followers who are ready to hitch up and follow along as soon as the army moves to the front.

In the nearer foreground, right on the shore, stand a few very plain sheds of rough lumber and adobe warehouses of firms doing business with the United States Government. Between these and Estrella are the blue waters of Corpus Christi Bay, now busy with marine life. Apparently some movement is contemplated for the anchored ships and steamers.

Already Miss Godfrey has eaten a hasty breakfast in the cabin, and attended by Zelma, stands eagerly awaiting disembarkation. Gradually her mobile fea-

tures become shadowed by a poignant disappointment. She had hoped that her father, eager as she for meeting, might come off in a shore boat to greet her. But no Jim Godfrey climbs up the side ladder. So she stands, her little foot tapping the deck impatiently, until nearly all the passengers have disembarked, and tries to hide her chagrin by pretending to be interested as the mules are swung over the ship's side and made to swim for their lives to the shore, though a tear or two will dim her eyes.

About this time Captain Hampton says quietly at her shoulder: "Everything is ready for you, Miss Godfrey. McGowan has kindly given me one of the cutters. I've got your baggage in it. With your permission, can I assist you down the side ladder?"

"Not until I've said a word to her," cries the skipper. Turning for a moment from his ship's duties, he takes the young girl's hands in his and says cordially: "My dear young lady, even if you meet your father you had better remain on board my ship with him until he takes you to his rancho. In addition, should your father not be in that rough and tumble shanty town there, my advice is for you to return to the *City of Mobile*. Then I'll take charge of you and put you back in New Orleans and civilization."

"Thank you, but I shall not come back, Captain. I am going to see my father, even if he is not here, even if I have to go to the ranch," she answers determinedly. "He may have mistaken the time for my coming."

"Then you've a pretty difficult task upon your hands, young lady," remarks the skipper glumly. Taking Hampton aside, he whispers a few hasty words, and Miss Godfrey catches the reply in low, quiet voice: "Leave her to me, McGowan. I'll see that she gets in her dad's arms."

Somehow this gives great confidence to the young

lady. She is in such good spirits as she permits herself to be assisted down the side ladder of the ship that she hardly notices that an army boat dashes up to it and a staff officer in undress uniform hastily passes her at the gangway and goes into consultation with Captain McGowan. That the craft does not carry a Texan planter who may be her father is all that concerns her.

Zelma has preceded her and is already seated with her mistress's hand baggage and big sunshade on one of the midship's seats of the cutter. As Hampton places himself beside Miss Godfrey in the stern, the mistress notices a curious austerity in his face as he chances to gaze at her octoroon maid. Once when he has occasion to speak to Zelma, his words are curt and the tone of his voice is severe.

Wondering at this, Estrella, who has already made up her mind that the gentleman at her side has a kind heart, and furthermore that he also considers himself altogether too great a gun to pay much attention to the doings of her servant, casts her eyes over Zelma to see if there is anything in her attendant's manner or appearance that has caused the Captain's condemnation, and discovers naught.

Upon this journey her mistress has thought it wise, in view of the young woman's attractive personality, to keep Zelma, though neatly, very plainly dressed. This morning her maid would be unnoticeable were it not impossible to hide the contours of a delicate yet slightly voluptuous Creole figure beneath a plain black short-skirted alpaca frock and to destroy the effect of her lustrous, languid, dark eyes by having the glossy dark masses of the girl's hair braided into two big disfiguring pigtails.

But even as Miss Godfrey looks, she is concerned to notice that Zelma under Hampton's glance droops

her eyes in an almost guilty embarrassment, and her attendant's manner becomes extraordinarily confused.

The boat having reached a little pile landing place, Hampton springs out and very carefully assists Miss Godfrey upon its rough planking. Zelma, with the hand baggage, has been passed on shore by the crew. With a sharp command to her attendant: "Keep close behind your mistress, girl," the Texan leads the young lady through a short street which has been made a quagmire by the wheels of Government wagons through which a band of army pack mules are tramping, splashing the black Texas mud over Estrella's neat travelling dress.

"Can't help roughing it a leetle," remarks Hampton, reassuringly, as he keeps between the delicate girl and some rough teamsters, and escorts her very carefully through a congregation of Mexican packers, for, lured by American gold, there were always plenty of non-combatant Greasers in the rear of Uncle Sam's army.

During this, Estrella cannot help glancing at the cavalier who is taking such very good care of her. A look of astonishment is in her face. Sharpe Hampton upon the land is almost a different being to Sharpe Hampton upon the sea. His air, which had been rather quietly languid on shipboard, has become strikingly alert. His movements seem quick as a wildcat's. This wonderful flexibility is easily apparent from the costume he wears, which is a mixture of that of the prairies and that of the parade ground. His legs are cased in buckskin breeches tight as if they were his own skin. His feet are in moccasins. A short buckskin hunting shirt clothes him from the waist up; over it is the loose undress coat of a volunteer captain, his rank shown by a couple of neat shoulder straps. A Mexican sombrero tops his resolute face, and instead of a sword, he wears for side arms in his belt a buck-

horn-handled bowie knife and a pair of six-shooting Colt's dragoon pistols, deadly as a rifle at a hundred yards.

Though his legs are slightly bowed from constant horse exercise, his pace is so rapid that twice he has to stop and accommodate his steps to those of the pretty feet which are striving to keep up with him. Under his guidance the party soon stand in front of a little clapboard shanty labeled by a canvas sign: "Branch Office, Martin Best & Co., New York." This the young lady enters with a very eager look upon her face to receive astonishment and afterwards dismay.

A clerk, who would be dapper were his shirt not covered with whiskey stains and his sleeves not rolled up to his elbows, looks carelessly up from some bills of lading, and, seeing this goddess of beauty and fashion, takes off a battered straw hat and ejaculates under his breath: "Gee cracky!"

As she mentions her name he bows effusively and says deferentially: "I'm mighty sorry, Miss Godfrey, but there's been a terrific mistake up to our Galveston office. We sent a letter there that your father had got word to us that he would be up the coast at Matagorda to meet you, not Corpus Christi. As soon as we got it we forwarded his instructions on the *Paducah*."

"Oh, mercy, the *Paducah* broke her shaft. We passed her outside of Galveston Harbor. That letter reached there after I left. What am I to do?"

"Well, your father's at Matagorda."

"Can I get transportation to Matagorda?"

"No; I am sorry to tell you all the steamboats go back direct to Galveston," replies the clerk.

"Then what am I to do? I must see my father."

Her escort, who has not intruded himself upon this interview, is standing outside the door, looking medi-

tatively at a sutler's boy trying to conquer a wayward bronco. She steps out to him and, hastily explaining the matter, says, consternation in her voice: "Captain Hampton, I am in a fearful dilemma. What am I to do?"

"You want very much to see your father?"

"Oh, so much. Think, I haven't looked on him ever in my life to know him."

"Well, the most sensible way would be for you to stay here until you can get carried back to Galveston. Some vessel in a few days must be returning up the coast. From there send word to your father and let him visit you at that place."

"I don't think he can come. He is too busy. He has a large number of Government contracts. He furnishes horses for the volunteer regiments they expect to raise in Texas, also the Mounted Rifles."

"Yes, I know that." Then, after a moment's consideration, Hampton adds: "I think your father made up his mind it would not be possible to get through to Corpus Christi with his scalp. That's the reason he didn't come here."

"But I must go to him."

"I understand your ideas on that point. Believe me, you shall see him, though I may have to make arrangements that you go by schooner to Matagorda. At all events, for the present the best place for you is on board of McGowan's steamboat."

Her trunks are being carried into the office of Martin, Best & Co. by some negro roustabouts. To them he says: "Leave these here for the present." To the young lady he suggests: "Let your maid carry your hand baggage, and I will trot you down to the shore again and get you on board at once." Then the tears of disappointment in her beautiful eyes draw from

him: "Only take the word of Sharpe Hampton that in some way or other you shall see your father!"

As they pass through the clustering roustabouts and Government teamsters near the shore of the bay a buzz of commotion and excitement seems to pervade the shanty town. Hampton apparently doesn't heed this, though when he gets to the landing place a short, sharp gun from one of the warships calls from him a sudden exclamation. He says, shading his eyes and looking over the waters of the bay: "Great thunder, look, every vessel in the harbor is going out of it!"

"Even the *City of Mobile*," whispers Estrella, dismay in her voice.

"By golly, if de whole flock of 'em ain't tooten' down to P'int Isabella to wait dere til der Greasers is licked out," guffaws a half-clothed negro sutler's boy, who is looking at the picture with two or three equally undressed companions.

"What does it mean?" asks the girl, faintly, feeling that this nautical movement affects her destiny.

As she speaks the soft notes of the bugles float through the quiet air from the distant camp.

"Mean?" cries the young Texan, the fire of battle making his eyes flash and bringing the blood into his cheeks. "Those transports all ordered down the coast; those bugles from the army lines sounding 'boots and saddles!' By the Lord, it means at last Taylor is marching on the Rio Grande. My Heaven, I've got to get back like blazes to San Antonio and bring the boys on quick."

The bugles from the distant camp sound again and Miss Godfrey, looking up dismayed, notices that the veins in her escort's forehead stand out and his eyes are turned eagerly southward.

"Captain Hampton, I'm afraid your care of me will keep you from your military duties," says Estrella, fal-

teringly. "Leave me at the office of Martin, Best & Co. That clerk is a gentleman. He will do all he can for the daughter of Jim Godfrey, one of their most valuable customers."

"Leave you here; the army going from it; in this disreputable, teamster, camp-follower gambling hole?" he glances over the rough town.

"Then couldn't you get some Mexicans to escort me to my father's ranch?"

"*Greasers* to keep you from Comanches?" half jeers, half shudders Hampton. "Don't doubt those red devils know the men of Texas are going to the front, and are already trailing down over the plains to jump each unprotected ranch-house. Come with me. I've got to go up to Taylor's camp, anyway. There may be some wives of officers left who can take care of you for the moment."

As he speaks the Texan is striding hurriedly along the muddy street of this purlieu of the army. Two minutes after he is at what proudly calls itself a livery stable, and is assisting the boys to hitch a couple of mustangs into a second-hand army ambulance, buckling strap and throwing on harness himself.

Upon the front seat of this vehicle he seats Zelma, tossing in her mistress's light baggage after her. With much more care he assists to the back seat Miss Godfrey. Springing beside her, he says sharply to a nigger boy, who has jumped in front and is handling the reins: "Drive lively to Taylor's headquarters, Sambo!"

So they dash up the muddy street, splattering the black mold upon several half-breed camp women, who are out looking for victims, one or two white-shirted gamblers who are strolling towards the martial music, and "Monte Juan," a Mexican card sharper, who would mutter a "*Carajo!*" as they pass him by—did he not

recognize and remember Captain Sharpe Hampton of Hays's Rangers.

As they drive up to headquarters martial music breaks out upon the sunny air. "See, the advance is beginning," whispers Hampton, his eyes glinting as he points toward the parade ground, where the regiments are now drawn up; their tents, already struck, have been put into the baggage-wagons, which are clustering to follow them.

Already the movement is in progress; Taylor and his staff are reviewing the advance column of his army that he is projecting on the Rio Grande, that stream the approach to which the Mexican Government has said means war.

A squadron of Thornton's Dragoons trotting with clattering sabres forms the advance guard. Immediately after rides the leader of the column, Colonel Twiggs, followed by his staff, hard-riding, dashing, young officers of fine bearing, but dressed in fatigue uniforms and rigged out for service, not display. Then with slashing route step come three regiments of infantry, their bands playing, their men cheering. After them roll the light batteries, their gallant commander, that superb artilleryman, Ringgold, riding ahead of his guns, his eyes vivid with the anticipation of battle and victory, gallant eyes that two months hence shall close in death on the blood-stained field of Palo Alto.

All through the ranks are faces radiant with hope of successful war, and many with thought of happy return honored with victory to their loved ones in the far North States. But this morning all eyes are turned southward, not to face about until they have borne the American colors proudly over the Cordilleras and planted them victorious on the capital of Mexico. Many of them will never turn north again; boys who have kissed their sweethearts for the last time; husbands who shall

look no more in this world upon wives' faces; men whose mothers shall wait for them by the home fireside in vain.

Yet all go cheering buoyantly along as if they were striding to fête, not to battle. For five months' waiting in this kennel of Corpus Christi has made Uncle Sam's war dogs very eager, now that the leash has been taken from them, to spring at Mexican throats.

The column disappears in the distance, the dust of their foot-tracks drifts away, but the United States with the footsteps of this marching column has begun one of its greatest territorial advances. Before those battle-flags are furled Uncle Sam will absorb Texas, California, and all that great territory that now permits him to span the continent with half a dozen lines of steel from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and so on to the commerce of the Far East; a national development without which the great Yankee nation's destiny would have been inefficient, incomplete, absurd.

As usual, quite a congregation of onlookers have inspected the departing troops. One of them a smooth-tongued, timid-looking hospital clerk, remarks: "Gee! When they hear the news up in the States, won't they give poor old Rough-and-Ready Taylor hell for this?"

"Yes, the PRESIDENCY!" answers a long-headed, cool Government commissariat contractor, spitting some tobacco juice in the dust.

But the hospital clerk guessed right, as well as the contractor. National expansion, as usual, was opposed by a certain number of the American people, who cried out: "Conquest, blood and Imperialism!" and, not satisfied with attacking the Government at Washington, inaugurated an assault upon the army of this country from the rear, doing more damage to it than the foes in front of it. For American soldiers have usually been

very successful in meeting open opponents, steel to steel, and gun to gun, though their officers have sometimes suffered wofully from cowardly assassins of their characters who have assailed them in the rear, and who even in the halls of Congress have cried out with a simplicity that would be ludicrous were it not horrible: "Great heavens, our cruel soldiers are defending their lives and killing *somebody!*"

But the American nation, despite their puny protests, still marches ever on, as it did in 1846, in the days of Winfield Scott, Zachary Taylor and the Mexican War.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE GOLIAD HOUSE."

During this Miss Godfrey's eyes have rested much oftener upon the face of the Texan sitting next her than upon the military panorama that has passed before her. As regiment after regiment has passed him, and battery after battery of light artillery has rumbled on, she has seen a flush of shame mingled with the light of battle coming into the clean-cut, Roman features beside her. She has observed that his clenched hands indicate some absorbing emotion, and that his thin lips which utter no words grow thinner in compression.

A sinking dread comes into the girl's heart as she notices the Berserker spirit rising in the only man to whom she can turn for protection in her extremity. For as she has ridden through the narrow byways of the sutlers' town she has seen sights that make her frightened to be left alone in it; deeply rouged Mexican *pobréta*s, sitting in the easy dishabille of the trop-

ics in front of their houses smoking their cigarettes and waving their fans at passers-by; low barrooms, out of which have strolled the scum of the army following, gamblers, three-card-monte men and sharpers. In addition, several painted Anglo-Saxon courtesans have made her shudder.

Finally, as the tramp of the departing column dies away, as the last glimmer of arms is lost in the surrounding forest, a mighty emotion seems to shake this man, and Estrella knows that he for the moment has forgotten her in the excitement of coming battle. For Sharpe Hampton half rises in the ambulance, his face red as blood with shame, the veins in his forehead swollen almost to bursting, and mutters in abased voice: "By the God of my fathers, not one Texan in the whole durned outfit!" Then, speaking to himself, he breaks out rapidly: "I must get on to San Antonio at once. The boys must be here before the first battle or it would disgrace our State forever."

"Oh, don't let me detain you," says the girl, proudly, though her heart is heavy.

Apparently awakening from a dream, the light of battle leaves his eyes, which grow tender. To her he replies: "You won't detain me from my duty."

"And why not?"

"Because my duty is, like that of any other soldier, to see that everything is all right in the rear before he charges to the front." With this Hampton looks eagerly over the parade ground, which is now a scene of busy activity. The General has gone back to staff business in his log cabin headquarters, another column leaves the next morning. Preparations are now being hastily made for this; commissary officers are busy with equipment and ordnance stores; aides-de-camp are riding about and giving orders; baggage-wagons being laden.

But the Ranger's eyes are not upon this military bustle. After a hasty glance over the heterogeneous throng which crowd along the lines of the parade ground he scans intently the log cabins of the officers' quarters, and seeing no lady's face except the anxious one that is beside him, he mutters: "There—there doesn't seem to be a single officer's wife about," then continues rapidly to Miss Godfrey: "You're perfectly safe here. Remain still while I go to headquarters. The General will probably have something to say to me about bringing on the Texan troops. While there I'll see what can be done for your accommodation and your return to Galveston."

As he springs out of the ambulance his eye catches a group of their fellow-passengers of the *City of Mobile*, and he says sharply to Zelma: "Girl, take good care of your mistress, and don't dare to leave her side."

Noting his tone, Estrella asks anxiously of her attendant: "Zelma, what is the reason Captain Hampton is so displeased with you?"

"I—I don't know, Madame," stammers the young woman, though her eyes are turned from those of her mistress.

"You're quite certain?" says Miss Godfrey. Despite herself her voice is rather cold as she steps from the wagon and directs her maid: "Please jump out, Zelma, and brush some of this frightful dust from me."

In the ambulance Miss Godfrey had been scarcely noticed, but as she steps upon the parade ground, the only lady on it, her graceful figure and stylish costume produce a quick sensation, even among the older faces about Taylor's headquarters. Among the younger officers a hundred bright eyes are placed directly upon her, and half a hundred moustachios are suddenly curled to make their effect upon beauty.

With this a dashing lieutenant in dragoon uniform

rapidly wheels his horse, gallops to her and, doffing his fatigue cap, says: "Is it possible? Can it be?"

And she replies: "It is," adding, with perhaps a tinge of coquetry in her tone, "I am glad to see that I haven't changed so much since Saratoga that you've forgotten me, Mr. Pelham."

The young man, bending over his saddle bow, whispers: "Forget you? Never." Then he breaks out: "Why in God's name have you come to this place now? Every lady by order was sent north a week ago on the *Paducah*," and springs off his charger to hold consultation with this beautiful derelict from civilization in the camp of an army that is now practically in active campaign.

As he walks by her side Miss Godfrey gives the young man an epitome of the circumstances that have brought her to Corpus Christi, closing it by murmuring, rather roguishly: "I am very sorry you think it unfortunate."

"Unfortunate! At any other time I should say it was more than good luck," answers Pelham, enthusiastically, his eyes lingering on the beauties of the girl that he thought enchanting in Saratoga, but which have been made overpowering by the development of the last two years. "Only a week ago I could have done so much for you here," he says, earnestly, but disconcertedly. "My mother, who had come down to see me, only left on the *Paducah*. You wouldn't have made this mistake if you had"—he looks at her earnestly—"ever—ever cared to write to me. But now I don't know what I'm going to do for you. My squadron, May's Dragoons, are here acting as provost guard and in general attendance at headquarters. But even we take route to-morrow morning. When the army ceases to patrol that wretched, cattle-thief, gambler, riff-raff, shanty-town down there, I don't know

what will happen in it," remarks the Lieutenant, apprehension running over his face as he looks upon the delicate waif from civilization. "You say Captain Sharpe Hampton of the Texan Rangers has you in his charge?" he continues. "From what we've heard of him since we've been in Southern Texas, I should think Providence has picked out for you about the best man in these regions to see you very safe."

This conference is interrupted by the return of Hampton. The handsome young dragoon strolling by the side of his charge has perhaps quickened the Texan's steps.

"Captain Hampton," says Estrella, in answer to his inquiring glance, "let me present Lieutenant Pelham of May's Dragoons."

The young men greet each other cordially, Sharpe remarking: "From the reputation of your commander, Mr. Pelham, I am inclined to think your squadrons will be heard from as soon as the campaign begins." To this, after a moment's consideration, he adds: "You've been located here some little time. Will you excuse a few hasty questions? I am told that the officers' wives have all been sent from this camp, which will be practically deserted to-morrow. Do you know of any proper place in which I can leave Miss Godfrey until I can make some arrangements for her safe transportation to Matagorda?"

At this the Lieutenant, after looking helpless for a moment, says: "I expect the only place you can get lodging for Miss Godfrey—and that's bad enough—is in the Goliad House." He points down the narrow dirty street leading from the camp towards the embarcadero. "It's a God-forsaken hole with a faro bank in one corner of it every night on the lower floor; but it's the *only* place."

He has just given this information when an orderly rides up, and, saluting, delivers a hurried order.

Receiving this, the young officer remarks, his face twitching with disappointment: "I'm ordered to immediately escort a wagon of medical supplies that have been left behind and deliver them to the Chief Surgeon of Twiggs's column. I'd hoped, Miss Godfrey, to ride down to the town with you and do my best to make you comfortable, but the order is immediate. Good-bye for the moment. As soon as I've delivered Colonel Twiggs's quinine and calomel I'll come to the Goliad House to see you. That's where you're going to take her, Captain Hampton?"

"Yes," replies the Texan. "I suppose it's the only thing I can do now; all the officers' ladies have gone north."

"Then this little note from the Assistant Provost-Marshal here, who is your humble servant, to Him Jones, who is proprietor of the house, I think will succeed in getting you anything that's in it," remarks the Lieutenant. Hastily penciling a few lines in his memorandum book, he tears the page out and hands it to Hampton.

"Thank you. I'll deliver it," remarks the Texan, as he turns to the wagon.

"Good-bye, Miss Godfrey," whispers Pelham, more in his voice than in his words: "I'll be back and see you this evening certainly." He squeezes the little fingers held out for his salute, springs on his horse and gallops away.

As the dragoon has been bidding the young lady good-bye the Ranger has been giving some orders to their negro driver, and the minute Estrella and her maid are seated in the carriage he rides with them into the town.

During this he is speaking rapidly. "At headquar-

ters I received a note that had been sent me there from the *City of Mobile*. McGowan is very much concerned that his vessel was ordered down to Point Isabella immediately so that he could not offer you the hospitality of his ship. The extra equipment for Hays's regiment that I bought in New Orleans, he writes me, has been put hastily on shore in a lighter. Landing and storing this will probably delay me here the balance of this day. During it I am going to try and find a craft of some kind that will take you up to Matagorda, for you must absolutely leave here by water."

"What makes you think that so very important?" asks Estrella.

"Well, from what I picked up at Taylor's headquarters, that Mexican scoundrel, Carrabijol,* has had the impudence to come up here, even during this last day or two, and sound the old General as to whether he would use United States troops to support him in organizing a revolution in the northern Mexican States," replies Hampton, earnestly. "Of course, it didn't take long for old 'Rough and Ready' to have the Mexican bandit hustled out of his camp. But if Carrabijol has been here, it doesn't take two guesses to be very sure that his master Canales isn't very far off over that prairie," he points to the west, "with a band of rancheros. Now Taylor, having commenced his march, Canales will move north to harass the Texan settlements. It would be but a toss-up as to whether you had better fall into this bandit's clutches or Comanche hands. Therefore, I must make arrange-

*"Carrabijol, the lieutenant of Canales (the great Mexican bandit of the Rio Grande), visited Taylor's camp at Corpus Christi to try and induce the American General to support him in a revolution against the Mexican General Government."—*Our Army at Monterey*, by J. B. Thorpe.

ments for you to depart by water. While I do this I've got to leave you with Him Jones of the Goliad House. This note from the Lieutenant, I imagine, will fix it all right; but if Him Jones is the Him Jones I used to know in Goliad a word from me will make you very safe with him. Him Jones won't hesitate to run a faro bank, but he'll run it *square* every deal."

By this time they have drawn up in front of a clap-board hotel of two low stories, whose canvas sign overtopping its roof bears the words: "Goliad House." Its ground floor is devoted to a bar and billiard room, though a flight of rough steps outside the building leads to its second story, which has a balcony in front of it.

"Just wait in the wagon until I see the proprietor," directs Hampton, springing out.

A minute later he comes back to her, assists her carefully from the wagon, and, telling the maid to bring her mistress's belongings with her, leads Miss Godfrey up this rickety stairway to the second story.

At the door of this they are welcomed by a hawk-nosed, alligator-jawed man in shirt-sleeves, who in response to Hampton's remark: "Jones, this is the young lady you are to take mighty good care of in my absence," pulls his forelock and says: "Captain, she'll be ace high all the time in this house."

Then the girl finds herself led through a narrow and uncarpeted hallway and ushered into two back rooms, both having cot beds in them and some cheap pine furniture.

"They're not very scrumptious," remarks Mr. Jones, "but there ain't as much noise in 'em as the front domiciles. And in 'em, baring skeeters, you can be as lonely as if you were in the State Prison."

"That's what I want," says the young lady. "Thank you, Mr. Jones, I shall be very comfortable here."

She looks out on the enlivening prospect of Mr. Jones's backyard, where a couple of razor-back hogs are rubbing themselves against the poles that support the building, and two or three more are rooting in the swill that has been chucked out of the pleasant kitchen of the Goliad House by the fat negro woman who acts as its *chef de cuisine*.

Some odor of coming meal catching Hampton's nostrils, he glances at his watch and says: "While I'm away, Him, you see this young lady has dinner."

"Yes, sirree; prairie-chicken fixins and wild turkey notions," replies Him, eager to offer frontier hospitality.

"She'd better have it served in her room. Her maid can bring it up to her," suggests the Ranger. "Now, Miss Godfrey, I'll see what I can do to get some kind of a boat to take you up the coast again."

With this he leaves the room. Catching a glance of his eye, Him Jones follows him. Out of earshot, in the front of the hotel, Hampton says a few hasty words to the innkeeper.

"What, that bang-up twenty-five-hundred-dollar, slick as camp-meeting piece of feminine flesh and blood?" mutters Him sternly. "This is a purty good place to run niggers off, and I'll keep an eye on the wench."

As the Texan Ranger strides down the street the hotel keeper emits a contemplative whistle, and says to himself: "Great alligators, who'd have thought that French China doll who wears silk stockin's and high-heeled slippers would need a cuttin' up." Then even Him Jones's hard features become perturbed as he ejaculates: "Cracky, I wouldn't be in that octoroon's hide if her master, Jim Godfrey, ever knows of her gallivanting. He's the tightest man with niggers this side of Louisiannie, and that's sayin' a good deal."

With this the boniface strolls back into his house, where he lives up to his word, taking up with his own hands the best kind of a frontier dinner of hot corn dodgers, broiled prairie chicken and roast wild turkey to the young lady in the upper rooms.

Miss Godfrey, being nervous, does but scant justice to the meal. Then, the time being heavy on her hands, she strolls to the front of the hotel, gazes out through a few panes of glass inserted in the door that opens on the veranda, and finds herself surrounded by the semi-frontier, semi-Mexican demoralization that has gathered about an army in winter quarters.

Across the street from her is a big dance hall bearing the sign, "Bella Union." Upon its front door is placarded "*Un Fandango Grande!*" And beneath this: "Last Big Dance for Taylor's Boys. Mexican Orchestra and Lots of Hurdy-Gurdy Girls. Carmelita Will Dance. COME ONE, COME ALL! ADMISSION FREE!"

On either flank of this building are ordinary saloons. In front of one, out on the muddy sidewalk, sit a few of the diamond-pinned gentry of her voyage, Mr. Yazoo Sam in white flannel suit and Panama hat quite conspicuous among them, his feet cocked up on a live oak tree. On the same side as Miss Godfrey's hotel are two or three more drinking shops, a general merchandise store and a shooting gallery, from which the occasional crack of a rifle indicates some army teamsters are trying to win the pipes and cigars that are offered for prizes.

According to Spanish custom, most of the ladies of the town are enjoying a siesta, and, the day being hot, but few men tramp its streets, though there are plenty busy handling freight down at the embarcadero, from which now and then an army wagon rolls past her, its

teamster cracking his whip and cursing his mules as they go through the adobe mud.

The aspect of the place is depressing to the young lady. She shudders slightly. It seems as if she were in a new and uncouth world.

Her dejection increases when Hampton returns and brings a shock with him. He says, glumly: "I have been down to the office of Martin, Best & Co. and had that clerk running around all over the harbor to see if he could find transportation for you to Matagorda. There ain't so much as a skiff that can be got, let alone a sloop or a schooner, which is the smallest thing that dare go out on the open ocean, now it's getting the season for northers."

"Then what am I to do?" asks the girl, half of herself, half of him. "What am I to do? I know your duty compels you to leave here to-morrow at the latest to bring down Hays's regiment. I cannot ask you to sacrifice your duty as a soldier for me." Then she shudders: "God help me; alone in this terrible place!" After a second she adds: "Mr. Pelham would do everything in his power for me, but is compelled by his duty to leave here to-morrow."

"And another would do everything for you," remarks Hampton, "another, Miss Godfrey; don't forget me. Let me think over the thing." As he looks upon this girl, made even more beautiful by the anxiety in her eyes, something comes into the frontiersman's mind that tells him what he decides within the next few moments will be vital to his life. He says, slowly: "Let me consider this when I am away from you. Your trouble keeps me from judging just straight."

Pacing the little veranda, a curious look is in his cold, blue eyes. They flicker and grow dim. For the first time in his life Sharpe Hampton is really frightened. With himself he communes: "Best keep away from

her. I know when I'm licked. A few days more under the glances of her sweet eyes and I'll go into my next fight scared that I'll die before I've won something I've got to win before I go under. And yet, it's despair, anyway. A rough, hard-fighting frontiersman must look like a galoot to a girl who's been brought up as finicky as she. But I couldn't look man nor woman in the face if I deserted her here, helpless and alone, even under the plea of military necessity."

Then the spirit that had changed defeat into victory in so many desperate contests surges up in him.

He says recklessly to himself: "Down at Mier* I drew a white bean. By the soul of old Ben Milam, I'll see if her pretty fingers will give me a black one, even if handsome West Point dragoons hustle with me for her favor."

He quietly steps back to the young lady, whose eyes are distraught with anxiety and her hands twitching nervously, in his soul one great question: "Will she do it?"

The two stand facing each other, a problem in each of their minds. The bronzed features of the Texan grow slightly pale; his hands also tremble a little; he says, slowly: "Miss Godfrey, I've got to get to my regiment up at San Antonio. Your father's hacienda isn't much of a ride out of my way. If you'll trust yourself with me alone on the prairies for days and nights, dodging bandits and eluding Indians, I'll put you safely in your dad's arms if the thing is to be done."

* During the unfortunate Mier Expedition, in 1842, the captured Texans were decimated by order of the Mexican Government. Nine white beans to each black one were placed in a gourd, and each one of the prisoners was compelled to insert his hand and draw out one bean. Those who chanced to take the black ones were soon after led out and shot to death.—*Editor.*

"Trust you? I know you'll get me there!" cries the girl, impulsively. "Thank heaven, everything's fixed all right." In proof of this she extends eagerly her delicate patrician hand.

"Then you're—you're not frightened of me?" he mutters; his face glows red; and her slight fingers are seized in a grip of steel, yet held most tenderly and respectfully.

Estrella looks at him earnestly for a moment. The color that is in his face seems to call the blushes to her cheeks also. The eyes of the young Captain of Rangers have something more in them than the request of confidence. She says, falteringly: "No, not frightened, but—but——" Her glances, that have been full upon him, seek the floor.

She *is* frightened of something. Intangible, but vivid, it makes her heart beat very fast. She hastily withdraws her fingers from the electric clasp of the bowie knife scarred hand.

"Now I've got a good many arrangements to make to get you off to-morrow morning," remarks the Captain, and turns towards the door almost as if to fly.

"What are you going to do?" asks the girl.

"First, I'm going to store your trunks in Martin, Best & Co.'s with directions that they be forwarded as soon as possible to Matagorda. From there they can go up by wagon to meet you at your ranch house. To get through with me you've got to travel flying light on horseback."

"Oh, I can ride! I've a riding habit!" cries Estrella, confidently.

"Not one of those civilized things," asks the Ranger, glumly, "like the girls use on the Shell Road and round the Lake Drive in New Orleans?"

"The same, if they're in the very *latest* fashion," answers Miss Godfrey, airily.

"Fashion? You won't ride fashionable. You have got to wear something that you can walk in, run in and ride boy fashion in. That jim-crack riding habit of yours would be torn half off you in the first mesquite thicket that your mustang pranced through. Besides, part of the journey may have to be made on foot. You don't know what's ahead of you."

"I don't care what's ahead of me as long as it takes me to my father."

"I don't believe you do," answers Hampton, noting the buoyant, yet determined, brilliancy of her eyes. "So I'll get the right kind of rigging for you."

Leaving her astonished, he strides off to the general merchandise store; but on the way there he pauses abruptly and communes with himself in dismayed tones: "Thunder, I see the giraffe ahead of me!"*

CHAPTER VII.

THE DANCING GIRL OF MATAMORAS.

The embarrassment brought about by this compact is perhaps greater in the lady than the gentleman. Miss Godfrey is blushing vividly as she calls her maid in to her from the next room and hastily tells her of the arrangement, directing her to make every preparation for them to leave in the morning.

Zelma's reply to this is disheartening. She says doggedly: "Then I fear you'll have to leave me here, my mistress. I cannot ride."

"What, and be all alone in the wilderness, with no

* A slang expression common in Texas at that day, equivalent to our expressive phrase in later American vernacular, "I see my finish."—*Editor.*

one with us?" breaks out Estrella, growing red to the roots of her hair. "Your not riding is all nonsense. My mother told me as a pickaninny you used to straddle an old mule in Louisiana. It—it seems to me you want to be left behind." She looks at her maid astoundedly.

This colloquy is interrupted by the return of Hampton. In his hand are two buckskin frocks that have apparently been made for Indian or backwoods maidens. One of these, though it is of the finest fawn skin and decked with some rather gaudy beads, brings consternation to Miss Godfrey. The other or heavier pelt is somewhat coarser in its making.

"I brought this for you to wear on the journey," remarks the frontiersman, briefly.

"Oh, good heavens, they've—they've got leggings," gasps Estrella, for those were the days before modern bicycle exercise had inured young ladies to generous athletic personal display.

"Yes, and you'll have to wear 'em, too," half laughs the Texan. "You'll look very well in the wild Injun act, though I reckon these moccasins will be rather large for your feet. Have your girl make the duds over to fit you this afternoon. This other frock is for her." He places on the table a somewhat plainer buckskin tunic.

"But—but Zelma says she cannot ride," rejoins Miss Godfrey, inspecting the costume diffidently.

"She'll have to," answers the Texan. "Straddle fashion, it won't be so difficult."

"Straddle fashion? I'm—I'm to ride that way, too?" stammers Estrella.

"Certainly, when there isn't a lady's saddle within two hundred miles of us. Besides, I don't think any bronco can be broken in a few hours to carry you lobsided. I'm going to make everything as comfortable

and convenient as possible for you, but there are certain things beyond me, and this is one of them. Do you stand by your platform? Will you go?"

"Of course I will. I'll ride in any fashion to see my father."

"Then give your directions to your girl," directs the Texan. "After that I'll take you down to Martin, Best & Co., where you can rummage through your trunks and get what is absolutely indispensable in the way of clothing and feminine nicknacks. I've even decided to risk a pack mule, though we oughtn't to take it with us."

"Certainly, I'll do anything you say," answers Miss Godfrey, and she takes Zelma into the other room with her. After a few minutes' dressmaking consultation she returns to the gentleman, who is impatiently pacing the veranda. "I've put Zelma to work on—on *the garments*," she says, as Hampton leads her down to the ambulance that is in front of the Goliad House waiting for her.

A short drive through streets in which Texas mud is changing under the hot sun to Texas dust and they are at the shipping office once more. Leaving Estrella in charge of the clerk, the Captain of the Rangers goes down to the embarcadero to look after the unloading of the equipment for the Texas regiment and its storage with the Government quartermaster.

Returning from this in about an hour, he is pleased to find that his pupil in frontier travel has exercised considerable self-denial as well as discretion in the selection of her wardrobe, and has a very small bundle made up.

"Only one dress," she laughs. "That's not very much for a lady who yesterday thought a good deal about her personal appearance."

"These trunks will be forwarded on the first vessel

that goes up the coast," remarks the Ranger. "You'll get 'em finally at Live Oaks by wagon train from Matagorda. We will put your immediate necessities in the ambulance and tote them up to the hotel."

With her bundle in his hand he leads the young lady out after repeating his instructions to the clerk.

Apparently he has been making some other purchases for her. The ambulance takes them to a corral on the outskirts of the place, near the shore of the bay. This is occupied by a bronco dealer; a band of some twenty or thirty mustangs, most of them half-wild, are running about it.

A clean-limbed, black, graceful-looking mare, already saddled and bridled, is brought up to Estrella by a negro boy. "I selected this one for you to ride tomorrow," remarked Hampton. "Now I'll teach her not to be skittish with a lady's skirts hanging over her flanks. When she's learned to stand this she'll probably be easy enough."

Tying a big, flopping Mexican blanket about his waist, he springs on the mustang mare, and Miss Godfrey sees an exhibition of horsemanship such as she had never seen before, the real rough-and-tumble article of the plains and prairies. On feeling the unusual accoutrement the mare utters a shrill, piercing, neighing yell and rears up as if she would fall over backwards, then goes bucking all over the corral, until as if despairing of getting rid of these whisking, clinging things, that swishing about either flank drive her mad with fear, the frantic creature clears the high stockade with a tremendous bound and dashes madly forth, disappearing in the stunted forest that surrounds the corral.

Upon this struggle between man and beast Miss Godfrey had looked in breathless silence. Now she

half-screams at the horse dealer: "Go after him. He's killed. He's dying in the forest there!"

"Reckon not," remarks the man with a contemplative ejection of tobacco juice from his mouth. "The Cap rides like a Comanche Injun."

In proof of this the black mare soon afterwards comes in sight, her ears down. As she lopes demurely back Hampton says: "I reckon she'll be all right to-morrow morning."

He springs off and directs the darkey boy: "Make a girl of yourself with that blanket, Pomp; mount the filly and ride her a couple of hours more to get her accustomed to this harness."

"You don't think she'll do me up, Massa?" says the negro, doubtfully.

"Oh, not a bit. She wasn't vicious; she was only frightened. Otherwise, I wouldn't trust you on her back," he adds to Miss Godfrey. "This little Mexican saddle with its topaderos to save your feet from brambles when you go through timber will be just the thing for you."

"Oh, how much trouble you're taking for me," says the girl, thanking him also with her eyes.

"Well, as I'm in command, I've got to see everything's straight, and a good horse is most important on the prairie. The speed and bottom of that mare, who I reckon is about as smart a mustang as there is in Southern Texas, may mean your life."

The manner of this man of combat is quite tender as he continues: "I don't want to take you out on the prairie uneducated. So I'll teach you to use a couple of little frontier trinkets I've secured for you."

To the young lady's dismay, he produces a pair of quite handsome, but very serviceable, five-shooting Colt's pistols. "Dragoon ones would be a little too

heavy for your small hand," he suggests, "and you will be able to kill mighty dead with these."

"Kill with these? I—I am to use them?" she falters.

"If necessary. Now I'll show you how. This place is all right for a little instruction. I could have taken you up to that shooting gallery in town, but the lights there are not the lights of the prairie, and I want you to learn this thing practically out in the open."

With this the Captain explains the weapon to her, shows her how to load its chambers and begins a two-hours' target practice that impresses Estrella, instructing her in the trick of snap shooting.

During this Miss Godfrey, chancing to make a bull's-eye, becomes elated and gets to laughing over it, crying "This is fun!" But is rather disconcerted to be told quite sternly: "This is business, and the grimest business in the world. People who talk about fun with revolvers haven't seen the awful things the weapon can do when properly handled. Look there!"

A rooster some twenty yards away on a neighboring fence is stretching its neck in full cock-a-doodle. To the crack of the Ranger's pistol the handsome bird, stricken in its triumph, falls dead with his head half-carried off his body.

"Now we will go at it seriously again," commands her preceptor, and keeps his pretty pupil pulling trigger till the lengthening shadows of the trees begin to show the approach of evening. "Reckon you'll do for the present," he says. "You've got nerve enough. Only be careful, if you want to make a very sure shot, to hold your breath as you touch the trigger, and never pull until you see something in front of your sights. You can't kill anything by blazing away at the universe."

As he assists her into the ambulance to drive back

to the hotel he remarks: "Just as well take these and keep 'em with you," and puts the pistols into her hands. "Always convenient to have such things ready in this part of the world," he suggests. "Handle them and get acquainted with them. Some day you may find them the best friends you have on this earth. Use them on your enemies, but keep one last shot for yourself, for I say to you, as I do to all women on this frontier, as you love yourself, don't let the Comanches take you alive. That would be my advice to my sister or my wife or my mother."

As he speaks the Captain's face for a moment frightens his listener. She can see by the light of the setting sun his clean-cut features twitch with an agony of retrospection, and his eyes glint with the same peculiar expression that Miss Godfrey had seen in them when he spoke to the gambler—only more cruelly deadly. Then this fades away into a look of unutterable sadness.

"You—you're thinking of something that makes you suffer," whispers Estrella, sympathetically.

"Something I mustn't let my mind dwell on," mutters the Texan. With an effort he apparently puts from him some heart-breaking recollection and goes to chatting with the young lady on their preparations for their journey of the morrow. So they ride up the main street of the town. Looking at him, she cannot help wondering what can have been the former life of this man, into whose hands she is about to place herself so absolutely, so unguardedly. She remembers he has never mentioned his family or his previous experiences save in the line of a Ranger's duty. But gazing at his clean-cut features and his direct, brilliantly frank eyes, and remembering that he always looks everybody very straight in the face—except her, as their ambulance stops in front of the Goliad House

BELLA UNION



CLUB HOUSE

Miss Godfrey places her little hand fearlessly in his and steps out quite confident that she has made no mistake in trusting the Texas Captain.

The frontier town has sprung into greater activity with the approach of evening. The oil lamps in the barrooms are commencing to twinkle merrily. The big canvas sign over the Bella Union is illuminated by candles stuck behind it. In front of this dance house are gathered quite a crowd of cattlemen, their pockets full of Uncle Sam's money from the sale to the Government commissary of beeves looted from Mexican rancheros on the Rio Grande, a sprinkling of gamblers, and a few troopers wearing the American uniform, sutlers' boys and mule-packers; in addition are the usual Mexican off-scouring of a border town, leperos, poblanas and the like.

From this concourse comes boisterous, uncouth applause, mixed with the sounds of guitar and mandolin and the merry jingle of tambourine. A bright, flexible, girlish voice is singing with soubrette archness that pretty Mexican melody, "*Las Ninas de Durango.*" There is a vivacious abandon and piquancy in the sweet tones that attracts Estrella. She glances across the street, but cannot distinguish the performer, the crowd is so close about her, though a bright swish of brilliant color now and again under the big oil lamp in front of the Bella Union indicates there is dancing as well as singing.

Further inspection is interrupted by a wild yell from the outskirts of the crowd. "Hoop-la! Hi-yi-ki-yi! Hoop-la! Why, if it ain't Sharpe Hampton!" A long, lank, slashing frontiersman, dressed in the buckskins and coon cap of the hunter, with a dark mustache and sparkling jet eyes, comes loping across the street and cries again: "Cap Hampton! Oh, this

will make the Greasers feel *real* good. They've been waiting for ye here!"

"Why, this is luck," says her escort, holding out a welcoming hand. "Harry Love, Wild Harry." Then, in answer to Miss Godfrey's questioning face, he explains: "Harry Love has ridden beside me and pulled trigger with me since we first met on the Mier Expedition."

"Hy-Ki, whar we botn drewed white beans together and lived on rattlesnake and cactus dressin' while we war gitting out from the Greasers," returns the frontiersman, who apparently is a slap-dash, nervous, and at times seems almost a flighty, man. Then he chuckles suddenly: "But I don't know yer!"

"Why not?"

"Why, ye're not smoking tobacco."

"I've reformed the habit."

"Oh, Captain, is that the reason you have been chewing straws all day?" laughs the girl. "You didn't think smoke was pleasing to me."

"Oho!" guffaws the Texan Ranger, putting his eyes on Miss Godfrey. "Ye've got him in trainin', have ye, Mrs. Hampton? I've heard, Cap, that ye've jest come down from New Orleans, but Great Taylor! I didn't think ye'd got anything as purty as that. She must have been raised in Tennessee. That's the only place they hatch such gals. My sakes, if she ain't as bashful as a young lady possum!"

For at this astounding outburst Estrella's face has grown rosy as the setting sun.

"*Not* Mrs. Hampton," remarks the Captain, getting very red himself. "You always were half-crazy, Harry, anyway. This is Miss Godfrey, Jim Godfrey's daughter, whom I'm going to take up to her father's ranch, Live Oaks, upon the Atascosa Creek. You may have heard of the place."

"Heerd of the place. Hoop-la, hi-yi, I war raised thar."

At this astonishing statement Estrella's eyes grow big and she half-gasps: "You—you were raised there?"

"From the time I war knee high," rejoins Love, quite earnestly.

"Then you're the man I want," says Hampton, eagerly. "You will help me take this young lady there?"

"Not if I kin help it," answers Harry, his face growing gloomy. "I've no notion of looking on that 'ere ranch again," he mutters, doggedly. "Ye see, I haven't put my eyes on the place since I war a boy of twelve, the night it war wiped out by the Comanches."

"Why, I thought it was Mexicans!" cries Estrella.

"Well, it warn't, though the Mexicans war so proud of gettin' the credit of that 'ere butcherin' they never denied it. But what's the difference whether it war Red devils or Yaller devils. My poor ole mummy and my ole man war rubbed out thar, though I escaped somehow, as they were burning the place, and found myself out of my head upon a bare-backed mustang way up towards Gonzales when I hit my 'senses." Love's bright eyes have a look of haunting horror in them. But after a moment he continues more calmly: "I guess I'm the only one alive from that 'ere massacre."

"And so you knew my father?" says Miss Godfrey, a tender tone in her sweet voice.

"Knew him? Does a pup know the boss dorg of the pack? It war only a piece of luck that old Jim Godfrey war out prospectin' and locatin' land when the redskins jumped us, or he'd gone up with his outfit also." The frontiersman looks at the young lady again and goes on: "I—I reckon I likewise know ye, if ye're little 'Strella. Don't ye remember Wild

Harry, the boy as used to catch birds and cottontail rabbits and red squirrels for ye to play with?"

"No," answers Miss Godfrey, looking at him intently and passing her white hand over her brow, "though I'm 'Strella."

"No rekellection? Reckon ye war too young. Why, Lord bless ye, I war round when yer little sister war run off by the Mexicans or Injuns, in eighteen thirty or thereabouts. Ye've heerd of her, I calculate?"

"Yes, I've heard of Sybil," murmurs the girl in subdued voice. Then she queries, eagerly: "You've seen my father since his ranch was destroyed?"

"Nary a time. Since that cursed Mier Expedition, whar me and the Cap and all of us war nearly rubbed out, I've been most of the time down on the lower Rio Grande pickin' up cattle and making things even with the Yaller bellies," answers Love. "I've got Uncle Sammy's gold in my buckskins now for a lot of steers I drove in to-day. Every head of 'em lifted from our friends, the Greasers." This last in the righteous tone of duty well performed.

"Anyway, you've got to go with me as far as Godfrey's rancho," rejoins Hampton, earnestly. "You've got to do it, Harry. It's a duty you owe to Jim Godfrey's daughter."

"And I'll do my duty to Jim Godfrey's darter, not only for her purty face, off which ye can't keep yer eyes, Sharpe Hampton, but because her dad war a mighty square man with my dad when I war a little boy, and her mammy, God bless her, war very kind to my poor ole mummy."

"Very well; meet me here at the Goliad House this evening," whispers the Captain, who sees that Estrella is quite moved at encountering one who had known her father and her mother when she was a little child.

"Right ye are. Count on me until I'm rubbed out."

"Thank you, Harry," remarks Hampton, quietly, and knows if he has secured an erratic, half-crazy man, that he has also obtained a very sure shot and a very true spirit to back him up in his journey across the prairies.

This conversation, held in the open street, has been quite private. The music of the guitar and mandolin and the song of the girl opposite have kept observation from them.

But now there seems to be a commotion, almost a struggle, in the little crowd. The tambourine girl is crying: "I will speak to him. *Caspita*, why not? If you're afraid of the Texan Captain, *mi patron*, I'm not, even if he has got his war paint on." And the dancing girl, in the easy dishabille of Mexico made more pronounced by the costume of her profession, comes running across the street, and holds out a tambourine, crying, in fairly good English and almost without accent: "*Un peso*, señor, for a song and dance!"

A snowy chemisette drapes the upper portion of her rounded and yet lithely graceful figure, which is that of a young girl, though its scant cut and the careless manner of its fastening permit glimpses of a nymph-like bosom perfect in its development. Her waist is girdled with a bright red sash, from which floats a short nagua of brilliant colors scarce reaching to the knees, displaying legs graceful as a fawn's and browned by the sun, for they are stockingless, which taper into little blue dancing slippers. Her face is wrapped coquettishly by the *rebozo tapado*, or floating scarf, with which the Mexican ladies conceal their faces.

As Hampton gazes carelessly at her she says, almost droopingly: "Don't you remember the dancing girl to whom two years ago in Matamoras you tossed a

golden doubloon as she danced on the plaza, turned away and forgot her? Don't you remember——" she is drawing away archly the *rebozo*, "don't you remember?" She tosses off the scarf and exhibits deep brown eyes flashing in coquettish vivacity. As she puts them on Hampton these become languishing, as if almost beseeching his recognition.

"By Jove, Carmelita!" says the Texan, suddenly.

"Ah, you remember me. *Dios mio*, you remember! Carmelita is happy," and she breaks out into a laughing Spanish song, then suddenly changes it to that sweetest of all Spanish melodies:

*"Cuando me llaman bonita,
El corazon me palpita."*

And, courtesying gracefully before the Texan Ranger, holds out again her tambourine.

Into it Hampton, with Ranger prodigality, tosses a gold piece.

"*Cielo*, I've got the mate of it, the one you gave me at Matamoras. I took a few beatings to keep it, but I've got it still."

Miss Godfrey is placing another gold piece in the tambourine, but the girl turns from her and says, petulantly: "No, not from you."

"Why not, little one?"

"I only take money from gentlemen. I don't rob ladies. What I get is from the cattle thieves, the monte men and the Gringo soldier boys. Like to hear their boss tune?" She raises up her voice and begins to sing "Molly Is the Gal For Me" with such enthusiasm and abandon, such winks and grimaces, that a few of Uncle Sam's soldiers, who are lounging about, join in the chorus and go into an impromptu dance in high cavalry boots as the crowd throw money to her. When Estrella again would add her *douceur* she de-

clines, half-angrily: "None from you; none from ladies, only from caballeros," then jeers: "If my patron over there sees me refuse gold, how he is cursing poor Carmelita." Here noting the expression on Miss Godfrey's face, she breaks out almost savagely: "Don't you dare to pity me, Senorita Hidalga!"

"And why not?" asks Estrella, looking at the slight, graceful, willowy waif of the frontier before her, whose eyes have in them a kind of pathetic anguish.

"Why not? *Caramba*, because I'm too proud and too tough. Besides, I don't care for the sympathy of women. The good sisters up in Chihuahua tried to make me a nun, but *Los hombres por me!*"

Running to Hampton, who is still in consultation with Love, she cries: "Come to the fandango to-night, *Capitán mio*. There you'll see me dance the Habanero and the cachucha civilized, wearing silk stockings and dressed Paris fashion." She puts her lips to his ear and whispers, "Come," a pleading intensity in her voice, "Come; she won't miss you for a little time."

Before Hampton can reply the girl is again dancing through the crowd, singing "Molly Is the Gal For Me" with even more roguish abandon than before. At its close she throws her admirers a mocking kiss or two and cries: "Adios, Caballeros, don't forget Carmelita dances to-night at the Bella Union!" She takes one quick glance at Miss Godfrey who stands, the exponent of civilization in light semi-tropical travelling dress, looking daintily nonchalant despite heat and dust, and snarls: "*Diablo!* wouldn't I like to pull you off your high horse, Doña Hidalga!" Even as she jingles her tambourine and skips into the dancing hall there are tears in the eyes of the frontier soubrette.

CHAPTER VIII.

“TO SAVE HIM, I SPARE HER!”

During this Harry, who has sauntered to the side of Miss Godfrey, is whispering to her effusively and proudly in backwoods candor: “Hi-yi, look at Carmelita trying to scalp Hampton; the Cap’s always the high hand with the gals. But don’t let that worry ye! Didn’t I see two of the purtiest *poblanas* in San Antone slash each other nigh into cat meat with machetes because the Cap wouldn’t look at either of ’em? Bless yer sun-bonnet, Sharpe’s as fastidious with women-kind as a coyote is with pizened venison.”

Apparently this eulogy does not impress Miss Godfrey over-favorably. As Carmelita makes her adieu to the crowd Estrella raises up her voice, a slight coldness in it, and addresses the object of Wild Harry’s encomiums, saying: “I think I’ll go in. Frontier gaiety rather fatigues me, Captain Hampton.”

So passing up the rickety stairway, accompanied by the Ranger officer, who has called a negro boy to carry her baggage, she reaches the balcony of the Goliad House. Here Zelma, having come at her call, she points to the bundles and hastily directs: “Pack these very carefully for our journey.” Then turning to Hampton, she nonchalantly remarks: “I believe you said five o’clock in the morning was the hour of our departure. At that time you will find Zelma and me ready.” The fluttering of dainty skirts indicates she has departed.

To this cool adieu Hampton takes off his hat politely, and, minus the young lady’s presence, remarks ruefully to himself: “Well, I’m hanged! I’ve seen northers blow up mighty sudden, but women are quicker.” He comes down the steps rather moodily, to be

joined by Wild Harry, who whispers in an impressive tone: "Mighty fine gal, that sah! Would be fine even in Tennessee," then goes on, buoyantly: "I've been sayin' a good word for yer, Cap." Getting no answer to this, he chuckles: "Snakes and 'gators, how that dancing gal does hate Jim Godfrey's lily darter!"

"Why the devil should Carmelita hate Miss Godfrey?" asks Hampton, savagely.

"You!" is the curt, but suggestive rejoinder. "Ever since down in Matamoras ye saved Carmelita a lickin' from her patron, she's grown as slick to ye as catamounts are to catnip."

"Nonsense! You're crazy, Wild Harry!"

"Not much! Folks think I'm out of my cabeza, but I ain't. I'm only cute, real cute, cute as a coyote; that's all. T'other one's kinder taken with yer, too," remarks the frontier philosopher, and goes off, leaving Hampton gazing after him, his eyes sparkling at his last suggestion.

But the glance of the Ranger Captain grows colder as, somewhat later in the evening, he sees loping down the street on a dusty and hard-ridden charger handsome young Pelham of May's Dragoons, who checks his horse suddenly in front of the Goliad House, throws his reins to the orderly that is following him and, with clanking sabre and jingling spurs, springs up the rickety stairs of the hotel.

As the dragoon is admitted by Zelma, Hampton mutters, *sotto voce*: "By the Lord, that's why she choked me off so short. Didn't want my presence to put a damper upon young West Point's honeyed speeches," and grows much more down-hearted than he has need to be.

For the Ranger's backwoods life, away from the artifices, affectations and emotions that give uncer-

tainty yet charm to the fair sex, has taught him little about the varying moods of maidenhood. Perchance, with greater experience he would be happier than he is this evening; though he has not heard Wild Harry's panegyric and does not know how good a word that harum-scarum frontiersman has said for him.

"Anyway, no matter how she treats me, she *needs* me! And I'm her man till I've placed her safe in her father's arms," says this knight of the prairies quietly to himself. Though as he steps down the street to look after his outfit and equipment for the morrow's journey, chancing to light a very fine Havana, he finds it extremely bitter to his mouth.

But Providence has other blows for the Ranger's heart this evening.

The fifes and drums are sounding the distant reveille from Taylor's Camp. Its baggage-wagons are parked ready for morning departure; its provost guard is rounding up those absent from the lines without leave preparatory to early marching on the morrow. The night has fallen upon the frontier outpost town, making it even more repulsive to the eyes of the young lady transplanted from the North than it had been in sunshine.

Still, Estrella is in passingly good spirits as she paces the little veranda in front of the Goliad House with dashing young Pelham, whose sabre clanks as his footsteps accommodate themselves to her shorter ones.

The young officer has chatted long and earnestly with her, telling her of his life on the plains of Nebraska and in the wildernesses of Iowa, where he has been scouting during most of the two years since he saw her at Saratoga. His eyes have spoken more than his words, indicating that perchance his tongue might say a great deal did he not deem it wise to chain it

upon the commencement of a campaign which makes it hardly fair to ask a girl to endure the agonies of a soldier's fiancée.

But Miss Godfrey knows just as well as she did in Saratoga what this bright-eyed, handsome fellow would say to her. She knows also that she has had his heart while he has been away from her, at least she thinks she has. This causes her to be tender to him, as he asks, anxiously: "You're sure Captain Hampton has made every arrangement for your safe journey?"

"Certain as that he has the experience to know what I require," replies the young lady. "Why, the Ranger has even broken a horse for my special riding with skirts, and has taught me to shoot a pistol so I can hit the bull's-eye once in a while. He is making a frontier girl of me," she adds, laughingly.

At this pleasant information Mr. Pelham looks very grave, but says, generously: "Yes, he's doing the right thing by you. He's probably the very best man on the border to make your journey across the prairies safe."

Just here a corporal dashes up, and saluting, cries: "Lieutenant Pelham, the platoon are having a hard time up at the General Jackson saloon."

The noise of a scuffle between some drunken soldiers and the troopers of the provost guard, who are trying to round them up, at a neighboring grog shop, produces from the girl a slightly frightened exclamation and from the officer a mental curse. "You'll excuse me for a moment, Miss Godfrey," says the dragoon. "I've got to look after this, but I'll be back in a minute."

The Lieutenant springs down the steps, leaving Estrella shuddering at the sights and noises of a frontier town in the full glory of its faro splendor.

The windows of all the gambling saloons are raised, the night being hot. From them, the noise of carousing men and the execrations of losing gamblers come, mingled with the laughter of ladies who love every man and the jabber of the mixed population, Mexican, Yankee, Negro and Mestizo.

Opposite, the big doors of cheap glass which make the front of the Bella Union are thrown wide open. Into it, lured by the music of a Mexican stringed orchestra that is playing a Jullien polka and the strident voices of its hurdy gurdy girls, are thronging a motley concourse of civilian camp followers of Taylor's army leavened by a contingent of Uncle Sam's boys who have as yet dodged the provost marshal.

It is but a short thirty yards across the street. The oil lamps of the dance house are burning very brightly and the sights within it have a kind of weird, uncanny fascination for this import from civilization. Looking through the wide open doors over the heads of drinkers and roysterers, Estrella sees Carmelita dancing with the languishing abandon of the Spanish the soft *cachucha* as she snaps the castanets.

For a moment the young American lady forgets all else except the vivacious charm of the danseuse. For bizarre effect, though it is a Spanish dance, Carmelita is robed not after the manner of Castile, but after the style of Paris. Her brocade frock, silken stockings and red satin *bottines* seem to add to her diablerie. To Miss Godfrey the very beauty of the girl makes her reckless abandon sadly repulsive. She shudders and turns from the sight; then screams and gazes horrified.

There are quick flashes of pistols in the dancing hall and over their reports the screams of women; people are flying from the open doors of the Bella Union, and a man falls wounded in the street below her.

As this happens, she is suddenly dragged into the

house by an athletic arm; the closing door muffling the sounds of a cavalry platoon dashing down the street and Pelham's voice shouting hasty orders to his men as they enter the dancing saloon and round up Uncle Sam's deserters and put order in the place.

"Never look at a fight that you haven't any business with, Miss Godfrey," suggests Hampton. The crash of a window stricken by a bullet emphasizes his remark. As he leads her back into her room he says: "While the scrimmage is going on in the street, I'll show you and your maid how to do up the bundles convenient for the pack saddle."

"Oh, thank you," replies Estrella, effusively. "I'm afraid our efforts have not been altogether successful."

As Hampton aids the young lady in her arrangements, they are interrupted by Him Jones, who, after rapping on the door, comes in and says: "That provest-marshal Lieutenant is out on the veranda. He asked me to tell you that as he doesn't like to leave his men, Miss Godfrey, he'd be almightily obleeged if you'd jst step out and say good-bye to him before he rides off to the Rio Grande."

"Of course, I will," cries Estrella, and passes hastily from the room, leaving the Ranger still engaged with her baggage.

As she steps on to the veranda, the town has grown normal once more, judging by the twanging of the mandolins and guitars that greet her from the Bella Union dance house.

Leaving his orderly waiting for him with his charger, the young officer runs up the steps very eagerly to the side of the young lady. "I hope this wretched trouble in the dance house didn't alarm you, Miss Godfrey," he says, deprecatingly. "It won't occur again, as we've gathered in about every man without leave in the town," adding severely: "I rather imagine

there'll be some bucking and gagging up at the guard-house for this; but I'm awfully sorry for the row!"

"And why?" This is a very rash question from the young lady.

"Because it will shorten the time I had to say good-bye to you," answers the Lieutenant, his voice growing so tender that it startles his listener. "I am compelled to report this affair at headquarters. Some drunken troopers have seriously injured two or three teamsters. So as I've only a minute with you, I'm going to make the best of it."

They are standing well in the shadow of the building. The sign of the "Army of the Rio Grande Saloon" projecting partly over this balcony from the next building, shields them from the observation of the street.

Miss Godfrey sees enough in the young fellow's eyes to warn her not to ask: "How?" But not waiting for the question, Charley proceeds to answer it with West Point strategy. He whispers: "It wouldn't be right to tell you how much I feel, now that I'm going certainly to battle, perhaps to death——"

"Oh, don't say that!" cries the girl, drawn by this artful touch into tender voice.

"Thank you for that tone," answers the young man in enthusiastic ardor. "You're kinder to me now than you were at Saratoga. Then you pleaded the child. Now that you are a woman—you remember I told you I would bring back your souvenir!" He pulls from his breast the piece of the American flag. "I've carried it here in Indian skirmishes up on the Missouri and it has been my fetich. I'll wear it on my heart down on the Rio Grande, and if I come back, I'll see if you won't give me for it what I want most in all this world."

Few young girls are wholly adamant to such a

speech, when uttered by a long moustachioed, shoulder-strapped fellow of gallant bearing and flashing eyes, especially when he is going to battle and perchance to cruel death. Under the softness of the Texan night, the strains of the mandolins and guitars playing soft Spanish melody from the Bella Union, with only two friends in this place so cut off from the world she has just left, Estrella feels the sadness of parting with even one of them and her beautiful eyes fill with tears.

Gazing upon her delicate loveliness, the exquisite refinement of this fair exile from civilization, made more striking by the strange setting of this shanty frontier town, the young officer grows very ardent; he whispers, his heart in his voice: "Say to me 'Come back.'" Receiving no answer, he pleads again: "Say to me 'Come back from battle.'" "

"Oh, don't talk of that. Of course, I—I hope you'll come back," falters the young lady, her eyes full of troubled sympathy, for in imagination she sees the stricken field and this handsome fellow lying dead upon it.

"God bless you for the words! God bless you and—good-bye." The dragoon's tone and manner are so impulsively possessive, she bashfully droops her head and lowers her eyes. As she does so her forehead is touched by two eager burning lips and brushed by a long moustache. Before she can either protest or dissent, a swinging clash of the door on the balcony indicates the advent of the Texan Captain. Through the panes of glass in its upper panel, he has seen what has indicated more than it should. He says quietly: "Miss Godfrey, I have made up your baggage with your maid into bundles suitable for the pack saddle of the mule. I think there is nothing further for me to say to you except that to-morrow morning at five o'clock

I shall be here ready to take you on your way to your father. Good evening."

He raises his hat and, passing quietly down the stairway, stands meditatively in front of the hotel. The next moment he is joined by young Pelham, who has whispered to Estrella: "Remember my souvenir!" and come into the street after the Texan.

To the Ranger, the young officer says: "Captain Hampton, you're as capable as any man on this frontier to make Miss Godfrey's journey across the prairies safe. You fortunately are not at present compelled by military duty as I am to turn your face to the Rio Grande."

"No, but I will be mighty soon," answers the Texan. "Don't doubt our boys'll be with you before the scrimmage takes place."

"Of that I am certain," answers the dragoon, "for we won't get to work immediately. Uncle Sam's boys are to wait until they've been assaulted. Those are the orders, I know, from Washington. In fact, every officer of the army has been cautioned not to strike *first*. Therefore some one has to take the blow. Some poor devil, not daring to order his troopers to draw sabres or open fire, will have his command destroyed and perhaps suffer court martial in order to enable our Government at Washington to say: 'We did not inaugurate hostilities. The Mexicans began the war.'"*

"Well, we Texans have no orders from Washington. Besides, I don't think you could prevent our boys from shooting Greasers at sight, we've got so in the habit of

*This was the actual fate of Captain Thornton of the Dragoons, and he pleaded at Court Martial that his very orders forbade him to make any attack upon the Mexicans until they had first assaulted his command. He was acquitted most honorably by the Court. *Memoirs of a Maryland Officer*, by J. R. Kenly.

it," rejoins Hampton grimly, as the dragoon swings himself into his saddle.

But here the light dies away in the Texan's eyes. Turning in his stirrups, Pelham seizes the Ranger's hand, wrings it and whispers: "Hampton, you're going to take the treasure of my life in your keeping for delivery to her father. God forever bless you for your kindness to her." As the Captain starts back as if the Lieutenant had struck him, Charley Pelham claps his spurs into his steed and dashes up the street, leaving a very heavy heart behind him. For Sharpe is extremely simple in matters of love and doesn't reckon upon a young man's enthusiastic speech and doesn't reason that though Estrella may be very precious to Pelham, Pelham may not be so extremely precious to her.

Therefore the Captain of Rangers goes on his way very moodily this evening, and as he makes arrangements for the coming journey, mutters mentally once or twice: "I knew it. Anybody could have told that up at Taylor's camp. However, she needs me, and when she gets through needing me, I'll go out and—thank God for a bloody war!"

Of this colloquy, Miss Godfrey, leaning listlessly over the balcony, has heard enough to make her furious with the fiery Pelham as blushing she has fled towards her rooms, and sank in bashful and perturbed dismay upon a chair. She marvels at the consternation that is in her as she reflects: "If Hampton saw that unexpected salute what will he think? And now the crazy words of that impetuous boy will make him suspect more!" Her confusion is such that she scarce notices Zelma, who in a half-hearted way has been sewing upon the Indian tunics for their journey on the morrow.

But her reverie is broken in upon by her maid stand-

ing frightenedly before her and pleading "For the love of mercy, don't tell your father."

Startled, Estrella looks up and asks: "Tell my father what?"

"That I was going to—to run away from you with Mr. Yazoo Sam," falters the girl in agitated voice. "Ever since Mr. Him Jones told me I was not to leave this room, I knew you had discovered my—my foolishness."

"And so your idiotic notion for this gambler made Captain Hampton risk his life on the steamboat to prevent Mr. Yazoo Sam decoying you from me," cries Miss Godfrey, astonished at the anger that rises up in her against her bondmaid.

But her indignation is checked by the appearance of the culprit. Were it not for her handsomely developed figure and the passion that now and again lights her eyes, though her cheeks are very pale, the young woman, in her short-skirted soubrette frock, might be a child shrinking from uplifted rod, as she pleads: "In—in pity for me, don't tell your father."

"Of course, I shall have no secrets from my father. Why should I not tell him?" answers her mistress impulsively.

"Because every one here says he—he is the most cruel master with his servants in all Texas," stammers the octoroon in broken voice with lips from which fear has driven even the rich blood of the creole.

"Nonsense, he is goodness itself!" cries Estrella, indignantly. "Those are some lies that frightful Yazoo Sam told you to induce you to run away with him." To this she adds: "Why, for Heaven's sake, if you wished to leave me, did you not go, Zelma, when I gave you your opportunity in New York? Then I could have engaged some woman who would not have wanted to desert me here in this wilderness."

"I did not want to leave you then, Madame," says the octoroon droopingly and tearfully. "Believe me, it was only after I saw Mr. Sam. I had never been made love to before by a handsome white gentleman, and he had very tender ways." Though, as she mentions the gambler, the red blood of passion is surging in her cheeks, crushed by her helpless situation, she pleads brokenly: "Don't—don't tell your father."

Before Miss Godfrey can answer, Mr. Jones comes up stairs and with frontier hospitality offers supper.

"Thank you, nothing to eat this evening," Estrella says rather sadly. "But to-morrow morning, please, at half-past four——"

"You'll have a real cute southwestern breakfast if old Sally, my cook, sits up all night to get it," remarks the border landlord. Then noting the drooping appearance of Miss Godfrey's culprit maid, he beckons the mistress out in the hall and whispers impressively: "Ye've diskivered her didos, but jest a light breshing with a hickory, and for God's sake, don't say nothin' about yer wench's wanting to run away to your dad. Jim Godfrey's the toughest man with niggers west of the Sabine," and so goes solemnly away, leaving Estrella shocked and stunned.

"I can't believe what you say about my father. You don't know him as well as I!" she cries after Jones in wounded indignation. But after a moment, coming into the room, this young lady, who has gradually discovered that companionship between her and Zelma is a practical impossibility where slavery exists, says: "I appreciate the devotion that brought you with me to this place. I shall always protect you, Zelma. Though I cannot believe my father is the severe man people here seem to think him, I shall say nothing to him. The episode is forgotten!"

"Thank you—thank you," murmurs her maid, gratefully, and kisses her hand.

"Anyway," continues Miss Godfrey, "if papa is such an ogre, I should be as frightened of him as you. As his daughter I owe him obedience and I'm going to give him it from my very soul; my dear father!" Tears of anticipation, hope and love well up in her beautiful eyes. "Now," she adds in attempted lightness, "let us get our garments ready for to-morrow. Perhaps we'll have an interesting day upon the prairies."

Perhaps Miss Godfrey *will* have an interesting day upon the prairies.

Even at this moment, looking out through a broken window from the upper story of one of the saloons opposite, the dancing girl is dejectedly disarranging herself of some cheap though gaudy finery used during her performance in the evening, and muttering mentally: "He never came to see me dance. Others applauded, but his hands were not there."

Beside her sits her patron languidly smoking a cigarette. He is a fierce but cunning-eyed Mexican, dressed as an extreme dandy of the northern provinces. By his side lies a black manga, but at present a cambric shirt snowy and fastened with jewelled studs covers the upper portion of his lithe, snakelike person. His slim waist is belted by a broad red sash, in which is stuck a nasty-looking stiletto and a pair of horse pistols. His legs are cased in silver-mounted calzanos of corduroy velveteen that are tight as his yellow skin as far as the knee, but from there are open, coming down bell fashion over his feet and permitting white drawers to show along the open seams. To his high untanned leather boots are strapped heavy, long-rowelled spurs. A broad-brimmed grey sombrero, trimmed with a two-inch band of gold bullion, lies ready to his hand.

This caballero is handling his cigarette with one

brown hand and is counting with the avaricious and nervous fingers of the other, the money from the dancing girl's tambourine.

This being finished, as he pockets the silver coins, he looks towards the Goliad House and remarks, half to himself: "Over there is Don Jaime Godfrey's daughter, the greatest *rica* in all of Texas. To-morrow morning she goes across the prairie, doubtless with little escort."

"*Bueno*, you have some fine idea, judging by your face," whispers the dancing girl—"about her?"

"An idea that will make us rich. The Yankee army marches south. She goes towards the north. Canales' troop of voluntarios rancheros isn't half a night's ride towards the west. What kind of a ransom would not Don Jaime pay for his daughter?"

"Ah, you mean to seize Dona High-horse," whispers the girl, clapping her hands excitedly. "Bravo," she who offered me money in his presence, she whom he looked at and scarce had eyes for me."

"*Diablo*," snarls the man, "you mean the accursed Texan Ranger Captain of whom you always think."

"And whom you always fear," breaks in the girl. "Whom you, Senor Bandit and Senor White Liver and Senor Bully, dare not face lest he will recognize you as the bandit who loves flowers yet steals cattle and murders the helpless along the Texas frontier." A smile ripples her vivacious features and she cries: "*Madre mia*, how I laugh when I think how he pulled the quirta from your hand and thrashed you with it in the plaza at Matamoras, the night you were going to beat me. That's two years since. You beat me no more. My little stiletto, the last time, was so nearly fatal eh, *mi amigo*?" Then the mocking jeer in her voice changes to an eager intensity. "But you want

me to do something that will injure her. I am at your service."

"I wish you to find out who rides with Senorita Godfrey to-morrow morning."

"*Santos*, I'll do it!" answers Carmelita. "But have a care you do your part. Play double with me and I shall whisper you are an *espia* for Carrabijol and Canales upon the Yankee soldiers. Then how long do you think you'll live, my poor Florito? *Cielo*, your face is as white as your liver now." As the man shudders from her, she says gaily: "I'll go over and sing a serenade to Senorita Yankee and find out who takes care of her on the prairie."

Picking up her guitar, she runs down the stairs, trips across the street, dashes into the Goliad House, gives a dainty feminine rap on Miss Godfrey's door, and sings in her sweetest voice a charming little Spanish melody.

As the portal is opened she cries to Estrella: "By your eyes, I knew you liked music as I sang to-day. Have another song from Carmelita before you sleep? Ah, you have a guitar, too. You sing like me. Your eyes seemed to pity me to-day."

She is about to spring into the room, but the young lady from the North looks coldly upon this pretty but outre creature in the gaudy finery of a frontier sou-brette.

Actuated partly by Anglo-Saxon indifference and partly by what she has heard of this girl's passion for Captain Hampton, she is about to say: "Excuse me this evening, I'm tired," when Carmelita, catching the denial of her eye, cries suddenly: "No music! Like to hear the story of a waif of the border, who never knew a mother's kiss, who never knew a father's arms?"

"Come in," says Miss Godfrey, impulsively. "Come

in!" Then she whispers sadly: "I had a sister who, were she alive, might say the same as you. Come in, pretty one."

"Ha, you're opening your arms for me. You don't think I'm a little snake. That's right; trust Carmelita!" and dancing into the room the delicate and agile creature almost nestles in Miss Godfrey's lap, and artfully tells her a very sad story of how she had no recollection of parents, but had been taken by the Good Sisters of Chihuahua, who wanted to make her a nun, but that feeling too gay for a convent, she had run away, and under the patronage of Florito had become the most celebrated dancing girl of the north of Mexico. "*Dios*, you should see me at fairs in the plazas of Monterey and Matamoras. Hum, the men loved me!" she says archly. "The women—" she shrugs her shoulders—"not so much! But you—" And she gets prattling with Miss Godfrey till she learns the details of Estrella's journey and now doesn't dare to refuse that young lady's gold.

But coming from this interview, as soon as Carmelita is out of observation of the Goliad House, she dashes Uncle Sam's good double eagle into the mud, stamps upon it viciously with both little feet, and says: "Not from her! Not from her!" then pauses and half reels and sighs brokenly: "My God, he—he protects her across the prairies."

So coming in before her patron who is eagerly awaiting her report, she remarks: "There's no good trying to attack this American young lady, my poor Florito. She has a whole company of dragoons to accompany her to San Antonio de Bexar."

For a moment the Mexican looks disappointed and dismayed, then he bursts out at her: "You—you miserable little liar! She has nothing of the kind. All of

the Yankee soldiers march south to-morrow. Tell me the truth."

"*Diablo*, I have, straight as if I'd sworn it on the Virgin!" she answers resolutely.

"You traitor!" He raises threatening hand.

"*Caramba*," whispers the girl, "why should I not tell you the truth when I hate her because he loves her?"

"Under those circumstances I expect you have," mutters Florito. "But if not—!" He goes away, a very nasty threatening in his snaky eyes.

Looking after him the dancing girl cries to herself: "*Santos*, how I hate her; but I love him! I have lied to protect him from those murderous lancers of Canales. To save him, I spare her: but Santa Maria, she shall not have *mi caballero*! I have loved him ever since he saved me from Florito's cruel hand, and loved—no one else. And yet, *Dios de mi alma*, under her very eyes he tossed his doubloon to me as if I were a beggar."

And this girl who had been roguishness and abandon and gaiety itself before the guffawing crowd of the frontier street, throws herself down upon a dirty couch of sheepskin and sobs and sighs as if her sprightly soul would leave her beautiful body.

BOOK III.

FRONTIER CHIVALRY.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PASSIONS OF THE PRAIRIE.

The fifes and drums are sounding the reveille and the bugles "Boots and Saddles" from Taylor's camp, as Hampton pauses with his outfit in the rear of the Goliad House, thinking it wisest that his exodus with his fair charge from this frontier town should be unnoticed.

His *caballada* consists of a mule and four mustangs, including the black mare selected for Miss Godfrey. These are all caparisoned in Mexican style, though the trappings on Estrella's steed are of somewhat lighter material and more ornamental workmanship than the others. To each saddle is attached that useful article for prairie travel, the lasso.

The pack mule, which is the regulation Mexican article as regards temper, stubbornness and intelligence, bears also the regulation Mexican pack saddle and is haltered so as to be led by Mr. Love.

Both frontiersmen are in the full array of the backwoods, sombreros and buckskin suits, each of their belts holding a brace of heavy revolvers and a long buckhorn-handled bowie-knife. Hampton in addition has two big dragoon six shooters in his holster, but to

leave his arms free for the assistance and guidance of Miss Godfrey, has his rifle slung cavalry fashion over his back. Wild Harry carries his long Kentucky weapon Western style across the pommel of his saddle.

As Miss Godfrey has promised, she doesn't keep them waiting. Him Jones immediately makes his appearance from the back door of the Goliad House, carrying the young lady's bundles, which he proceeds to adjust on to the pack-saddle of the mule, the animal as usual flinging his heels about and cutting up in true burro fashion.

As this is being done, two putative Indian girls make their appearance and come timidly out of the hotel. They are Miss Godfrey and her attendant, Zelma.

"Geehosh—Nebuchadnezzar!" remarks Mr. Love under his voice; and immediately slings Estrella's maid with free and easy hand upon her saddle and arranges it for her, while Hampton with somewhat more ceremony assists Miss Godfrey to mount man-fashion the dainty black mare he has selected for her.

On it Estrella makes a very pretty Indian picture. The soft fawn-skin of her tunic, which reaches somewhat below the knees, outlines her rounded graces of bust and shoulders. From beneath its skirts are poked out very diffidently tight buckskin leggings, that as they taper into the little beaded Indian moccasins, display beauties hitherto unknown to the ardent frontiersman.

"You look quite active and frontier-like," he says reassuringly as he gazes at the girl, who hangs her head bashfully.

"Oh, I feel light as a fawn," remarks the dainty equestrienne, then adds gratefully: "Thank you, the stirrup leathers are just right," and asks: "What do you call my mare?" as she caresses the graceful black head that is turned towards her.

"Mulefoot," says the frontiersman.

"My, what a funny name. Why do they call her that?"

"Because her hoofs are formed like a mule's, which makes her more sure-footed for your journey," answers the Ranger, patting the mare's graceful neck also; like all true horsemen, he loves the faithful companions of his adventures and his forays.

"Pistols all right?" he asks earnestly.

"Yes, I—I think so. I loaded them as you instructed me, very carefully," she remarks as Hampton draws the five-shooters from the cases in which they are lying on the ground, and examines them carefully. "But I didn't know exactly how to wear them."

"I'll show you." As he places the belt about her, he suddenly pauses and laughs: "I reckon this is all of a foot too big for you." Making the necessary hole in the leather, he buckles it about the young lady's delicate waist, blushing like a boy as he does so. "You've had plenty to eat?" he asks.

"Oh, yes; pork dodgers, chicken fixin's, dough doings and sausages," she replies. "Mr. Jones took very good care of me."

Then they ride away, for Harry Love has been equally expeditious, Estrella waving a hand laden with grateful thanks towards Him Jones, who, having no hat upon his head, pulls his forelock, and says: "Bless yer eyes, Miss. Tell yer dad Him Jones has not forgotten him," and, getting into his house, mutters: "How could I forgit Jim Godfrey when he did me in a hoss trade?"

Hampton and his party don't take the main street of the town, but ride around its outskirts, the Ranger not wishing Greaser eyes to see he has the embarrassment of women in his convoy. Out of the town they take the well-beaten trail that leads them along the

higher lands a little above the shores of the bay westward towards the ferry on the Nueces River.

Reaching this in about three-quarters of an hour, they find the ferry that has been used in bringing droves of cattle to Taylor's Army still in operation. Here, under some oaks and cotton-woods that line the river's banks, they await the return of the boat, which is a big scow now on the other side of the river. Guided by means of a rope cable stretched across the stream, it is coming back to their side laden with cattle. As they stand watching it, a Mexican lolls on the bank smoking a cigarette and lazily gazes at it also.

"You're waiting to take the ferry, *senor*?" says Hampton pleasantly to the man.

"No, *senor*; I am here to help drive that band of steers, when it is landed, to the commissariat officer of the Yankee Army." The Mexican points to his horse, that at some little distance is wandering about, haltered by his lariat, cropping the grass of the prairie, though the grazing is not over good, the ground having been beaten and trampled by the hoofs of the many cattle that have crossed in the last few months to feed Uncle Sam's soldiers.

As Hampton is about to saunter indifferently towards this animal, the man, springing up, says eagerly with the politeness of his nation: "*Quiere a fumar caballero,*" proffering a handful of cigarettes.

"*Con gusto, senor,*" replies the Texan, accepting the offer with equal politeness. Lighting up, he takes a few careless steps towards the horse, then turns away, and, apparently no more interested in the Mexican, goes to chatting with Miss Godfrey, asking her how she has passed the night in the Goliad House.

"Rather peculiarly," rejoins the young lady. "I had a visit from the dancing girl, who came over and sang

to me and told me of her curious history and unhappy life."

At this Hampton looks astonished, then slightly concerned, and asks rather sharply: "What did *you* tell her?"

"Oh, the details of our trip; how in the goodness of your heart you had offered, notwithstanding the urgency of your ride to San Antonio, to take me through the dangers of the prairie to my father's ranch." Then Estrella's face grows radiant, she asks eagerly: "Don't you think my father may be now at his hacienda, having come up from Matagorda when he found I would not join him there?" Her eyes have tender tears in them; she murmurs: "Oh, if I could see him at once upon arrival!"

To this the Texan answers nothing, but hurries their embarkation on the ferryboat, which has by this time reached their side of the river. Under his directions, the crossing is rapidly achieved, Hampton urging the ferrymen to their work by what would seem to Miss Godfrey an almost too liberal reward, did it not speed her towards her father's arms.

During their water excursion, a shadow seems to cross once or twice Hampton's well controlled features. He appears to be in deep thought. The moment they have landed on the north bank of the Nueces, he takes Love with him out of earshot of the young women and says: "Did you see that Mexican on the other side of the river?"

"Of course, Cap. Took a purty good look at him, too."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about him?"

"Nothin' particular; regulation greasy, regulation dirty, regulation soft voice, regulation snake."

"Yes, but his horse had a brand on it only used south of the Rio Grande," replies Hampton, "in fact, about

the brand that would be on one of Canales' or Carrabijol's horses. Carrabijol himself was in Corpus Christi only a day or two ago. His band can't be any farther away than'll keep 'em safe from Taylor's outposts. Probably about west of here."

"Then we'd better travel quick," mutters Harry, "now we've got women with us."

"Perfectly right!" Hampton steps to Miss Godfrey and looking out over the prairie, which now towards the west and north is only bounded by the horizon, though dotted with its clumps of timber, he says: "We're about a hundred miles from your father's rancho, on a course a little west of north. I've marked it on this pocket compass. Keep that with you! In case by any accident you are separated from me or lost on the prairie, follow the direction marked on this compass, and don't turn away from it. Remember that. Your life may depend upon it." Then he calls: "Harry, have you given to Zelma the pocket compass marked as I told you and the proper directions?"

"Yes, Cap, I told her that as we came along."

"How does she ride?"

"Quite well for a——" Love was going to say "Yaller gal," but the beauty of the octoroon makes him say, "for a woman."

"Well, her horse is all right. I had the negro boy last night accustom it to skirts. Now follow along!" and the Captain rides quickly by Miss Godfrey's side out upon the prairie, heading slightly to the west of north. "I want to get inland," he says, "so that when we strike the next stream, we will be high enough up it, to find a ford. I don't want to make you swim it on horseback."

So the mustangs lope over the prairie, which begins to seem boundless to Miss Godfrey, as the Bay of Corpus Christi has entirely passed from her sight, and

now on all sides, lying before her is a sea of green, dotted here and there with mottes or islands of trees of various kinds, pecans, plums, live oaks and sycamores, just springing into their full foliage.

The morning mist spreading over it, makes the scene weirdly fantastic as they pass great clumps of live oak covered with the long bearded moss peculiar to the Southern States. In the mist of the morning these masses of timber assume fantastic shapes and curious tints, sometimes looking like mediæval castles, at others gleaming palaces of silver, then glowing red and gold beneath the Southern sun that is rising over them and dispelling the fog. Soon the whole park-like landscape under its beams becomes warm and bright and radiantly soft.

Suddenly Estrella utters an exclamation of delight. The sea of green is changing into an endless sea of flowers, yellow, violet, red and blue. Myriads of lovely prairie roses, asters, dahlias and tuberoses give out their perfumes to her open nostrils and their variegated colors to her admiring eyes. Boundless the flowery ocean spreads before her, broken here and there by the green islands of trees, from which issue the songs of myriads of birds—orioles and cardinals and chaparral cocks giving out their morning welcome to the sun. It is a bright March morning on the Texas prairies.

The green tree mottes are made beautiful by clinging grape vines everywhere, and some of them are thickets of fruit trees, plums and wild peaches, covered with colored blossoms that foretell a harvest of luscious fruit. There is no sweeter morsel to the human tongue than the wild southwestern plum.

Enchanted by the sight, the girl goes to prattling merrily as she rides beside the rather stern-faced Texan Ranger, whose eyes—the sharp eyes of the scout—

seem to be restlessly inspecting and investigating every feature of the changing landscape.

"I had quite a curious episode in the Goliad House last night, Captain Hampton," she says.

"What was that?" asks the Ranger eagerly.

"Oh, Him Jones's cat!" she laughs. "The canvas ceiling over my head had holes in it. It was wonderfully weird to see the pussy's paws come through these holes when she would lose her footing as she made an all-night's hunt for the rats and mice that scrambled about over my head. I would have been frightened if I hadn't become a—frontier girl. Poor Zelma was terrified at the creature." Then Miss Godfrey whispers: "From what Mr. Jones said to me, and from the directions you gave my maid yesterday, you must have known of her foolish escapade with Mr. Yazoo Sam. Please don't mention it to my father if you meet him."

Hampton glances back at the octoroon, whose handsome though delicately voluptuous figure is well displayed by the buckskin tunic, and some stories that he has heard of Jim Godfrey coming into his mind, he says pointedly: "Most certainly."

"Thank you, Captain Hampton," returns Estrella, adding earnestly: "I don't want you to have a bad opinion of Zelma. She doesn't deserve it." And as they ride along, she tells him of her maid's devotion in following her from New York.

As his companion talks, she gives many glimpses of her lovely soul and the Texan Captain grows even more tender to this beautiful creature who is so dependent upon him for protection. Even as he listens to her, his every sense is on the alert to keep her very safe.

But the scene made pleasant by the low songs of humming birds and the humming of innumerable bees, elates the girl and makes her confident. She says:

"This is one of the flower prairies of which you told me on the steamboat, isn't it, Captain Hampton?" and looking around, cries: "As if there could be danger here!"

Just then there is a little sker-r-r a few paces to one side of her. For answer, the Ranger silently points towards a cactus bush. She gives a little scream of horror and shudders: "Heavens and earth, isn't that a—a rattlesnake?"

"Yes. You see it isn't all quite as secure as it looks. There are other beasts that will do you to death in those canebreaks." He points to his right hand, where a line of timber indicates a watercourse. "At night you'll hear the howling of the jaguars in that chaparral, and even now,—listen! You notice that rooting and grunting? That comes from the little wild hog, the peccary, as plucky a brute as walks the earth. Kill one, and you've got to slay the whole drove, or they'll tear you in pieces as sure as they've white tusks."

Under the frontiersman's instructions, the girl becomes impressed also with the animal life about her. His quick hand indicating them, she notices the innumerable deer that they disturb, grazing, some of their herds numbering hundreds.*

They have ridden not more than three hours when Hampton says: "I reckon we'd better stop and give you a rest."

"Why, I'm not tired," she answers, rather indignantly. "I'm accustomed to horse-back exercise."

"Yes, but your maid isn't," he replies. "Besides, this is the proper time to rest and graze our horses. We won't go on until the extreme heat of the day is

* In passing through Southern Texas in 1846, the prairies seemed literally alive with deer, it was no uncommon spectacle to see from one to two hundred in a single herd.—*Captain Randolph B. Marcy, in The Prairie Traveller.*

past." With this he calls to Love: "Harry, best get something nice for the young lady to eat."

"Sartin sure," replies the Ranger, and turns his horse off towards the line of timber that indicates a little watercourse.

A few minutes after by a little rivulet that runs slowly over the level prairie, Hampton stops his cavalcade, and assisting Miss Godfrey and Zelma from their mustangs, he places some blankets in a little secluded nook under a cottonwood and says: "Take a siesta while I fix things." Gazing out from her leafy bower Estrella can see the easy grace with which he hitches the animals by their riatas in such manner that they can get plenty of good grazing, and taking their baggage off the pack mule, makes preparations for a mid-day camp, kindling in a hollow a fire of dry wood so as to give out as little smoke as possible.

Zelma has proffered her assistance, but Hampton says to her considerately: "No, you're too tired, my poor girl. Do what you can for your mistress, and then lie down yourself. I can get a frontier meal a good deal easier than you can."

He is busied about these things, as Wild Harry comes loping up on his mustang carrying in his hand a fine young wild turkey; across his saddle hangs a two-pronged buck.

"Reckon here are some nice things for yer white teeth," he chuckles to Miss Godfrey, "This gobbler is as tender as chicken"; then cries: "Let me do the chores, Cap, while you rummage up some sweet doin's for the prai-ha-rie princess." With this Mr. Love goes to butchering and dressing the game.

Half an hour afterwards, Miss Godfrey is aroused from her siesta to be astounded at a backwoods meal. "Didn't know ye could get such nice things on the prairie, did yer? Try yer teeth on this ere ven'son

steak. No, filled up on turkey?" remarks Wild Harry, during the repast, "Keep a hole in ye for the strawberries."

"Strawberries?"

"Yes, and honey. Look here," and the frontiersman laughs as Hampton produces from a lot of big leaves into which he has gathered them, a pile of freshly plucked, red, juicy prairie strawberries that have ripened under the hot Southern sun.

"And—and honey?" says the young lady, her pearly teeth crunching some combs full of sweetness.

"Why, yes," remarks Wild Harry. "Bless yer heart, didn't ye know every tenth tree about here is a bee tree? Didn't ye hear hummin' 'nough in the air? Waugh! Ye'd go through the prairies and starve to death with plenty around ye."

During this Hampton has said little, some problem of travel apparently being in his mind, but Miss Godfrey has several times turned grateful eyes upon the Texan Captain, not only for the consideration with which he has anticipated her every want, but for the generous courtesy that Zelma has received at his hands, her maid's comfort being looked after as carefully as if the octoroon were a fine lady.

Consideration of Zelma puts an idea into her mistress's vivacious brain. She turns to Wild Harry and asks, a slight hesitancy in her manner and almost a pleading in her voice: "Mr. Love, you know my father very well; is he a very stern and severe man?"

"Why, bless ye, he's as kind a fellow as ever was good to a frontier boy," answers Harry so enthusiastically that Miss Godfrey's face lights up with pleasure. She nods smilingly at Zelma, whose eyes have grown very anxious at her mistress's question, and cries reassuringly: "You see!"

As they finish the meal Hampton suggests: "We'd

better cook enough to last us for a day or two. By to-night we'll be getting in the range of the Comanches coming up from foray across the Rio Grande, and it may not be prudent to light a fire. I saw what were smoke signals, I think, to the north of us."

"So did I, Cap," returns Wild Harry, "but didn't cackle about it, reckonin' they were mirages."

"Of course, they were very faint, and I may have been mistaken. They must have been nearly thirty miles away," replies Hampton. "But it's best to be safe." His glance has concern in it as he turns to Miss Godfrey and says: "I don't want to alarm you, but you should know what may be before you."

As he leads her horse up to her Estrella holds out her little moccasin to place it in his hand for him to put her in the saddle. But he astonishes her by saying: "It would be more than pleasant to do you the service, Miss Godfrey, but I want you to learn to take care of yourself here."

"So you won't assist me into the saddle?" she asks, a slight moue giving piquancy to her face.

"On the prairie a woman who can't mount a horse by herself is at times mighty helpless. Just try to get on your mare man-fashion, so as to be independent of me." He holds Mulefoot very carefully and instructs her how to put her foot in the stirrup and swing herself into the saddle.

After a little he suggests: "Do it without my holding your mare. Do it all by yourself, as if you were out alone in the wilderness."

In a few essays, Miss Godfrey succeeding in this, he says with a slight sigh: "Now you're more backwoods." For this lesson in equestrianism has been a very pleasant one to the riding master; several times his hand has touched that of his fair pupil.

"Yes, I feel as if civilization were a hundred thousand

miles away from me!" cries the girl. "Wild turkeys and deer! Some day you must teach me to shoot with a rifle so I can do my own hunting."

The "some day" seems very pleasant to Hampton. It suggests that the beautiful creature by his side thinks he will not pass out of her life entirely with this prairie ride. Then the words of Pelham, the dragoon, come back to him and make the future look very blank. He calls shortly: "Love, have you put Zelma into the saddle?" Next suddenly exclaims: "Where's Wild Harry?"

"Mr. Love rode back on the trail," answers the octo-room.

"And I did not hear his horse's hoofs," mutters the Texan Ranger in a dazed way. "What's come into my ears?" Miss Godfrey, who is already mounted, is blushing slightly.

The next moment Hampton is once more alert. "If Love rode back on the trail, he's seen something," he says as he hastily swings Zelma into her saddle and goes to packing the mule with a cool but wonderful dexterity.

This he has not finished before Love makes his appearance. Riding in from behind a timber motte, he cries: "Cap, there's somebody coming after us along the trail!"

"Who?"

"Can't tell."

"How many?"

"Only one."

"Are you sure there is only one?"

"Certain as I'm chewing terbaccy! It's too far off for me to make him out, but I can see him every time he gets out into the air line as he passes the timber."

"Very well. We'll wait for him," says Hampton, laying his hand upon Miss Godfrey's bridle, for she

has rather timidly and excitedly started to ride off. "Don't you think Harry and I are good for one?" he laughs.

"Yes, for twenty of them," she answers confidently.

"Just ride back, Harry, a little bit and see who it is, and also that there is no one following him. Be mighty careful of that!" directs Hampton, and finishes leisurely the packing of the mule.

Five minutes after Wild Harry rides in again. He says: "Golly, here's news for ye!"

"There are more following him?" asks Hampton quickly, and springs into his saddle.

"No—but perhaps thar ought ter be," chuckles Love. "Sure as snakes ain't 'gators, it's a woman that's trailing us."

"You're crazy!"

"No, I ain't; I'm only cute. I kin see the flopping of her skirts."

A minute or two afterwards Hampton, returning from personal observation, says: "Blazes, you're right!" then mutters in perturbed tones: "It's Carmelita."

"The—the dancing girl!" ejaculates Miss Godfrey, a curious look coming over her face.

"And jumping jerrico, how she is comin'! Can't keep away from ye, Cap, can she?" cries Love, jovially. "Didn't I tell ye, Miss Godfrey, he war always ace high with womankind?"

At this Estrella can see the Texan Captain bite his lip beneath his mustache and give Mr. Love a decidedly unpleasant glance for his panegyric, as he directs sharply: "Take post upon our backtrail and see no cursed Greasers are sneaking after her. She's hand-and-glove with half the bandits on the border."

As Wild Harry turns his mustang away Carmelita

dashes past him, bringing with her into this quiet, green prairie glade passion undisciplined, unbridled.

Mounted upon a mustang whose sides are throbbing and whose parched tongue is hanging out between his lips, the perspiration and dust of rapid travel upon her excited and piquant features, she sharply reins up her steed upon his haunches before the Texan, and pants: "Thank God, I've—I've overtaken you!"

Here Miss Godfrey is almost shocked at the sternness with which Hampton greets the dancing girl. "Well, what are you following us for?" asks the Ranger Captain, coldly and shortly.

"*O Dios mio*, you speak in that tone to me—when I have ridden risking my life to save yours!" wails the girl, still struggling for breath. "*Santos*, you're cruel." Her dark brown eyes blaze in a kind of agony.

"To save my life! What do you mean?"

"This," answers Carmelita, a low, despairing misery in her liquid voice, and her speech broken in its English accent by the terrible exertion of her ride and perchance the excitement that is in her. "This! Last night an *espia* of Carrabijol, he came to me; he say: 'Catch her, the American heiress. Go over to the Goliad House and see who rides with her on the prairie to-morrow, and if she is easy prey.' Then I go over. I ask; I inquire."

"And you have told? God forgive you!" screams Estrella.

"No. I go back. I say: 'It is no good. The Yankee donna has two companies of dragoons to ride with her to San Antonio, Taylor's boys that you fear.' To myself I say: 'Hampton goes with her. Now I have saved him. There will be no pursuit.' But this morning I find the *espia*—he is so cunning—he has discovered that only two men go with the Americana. He doesn't know what two men, or perhaps he be

frightened. But the man from the ferry that he keep there to find out, come riding back and tell him only two caballeros ride with the American girl."

"The damned cigarette smoker!" mutters Love, who is not out of earshot. "Whaugh, when I draw bead on him he'll watch the ferry over the Jordan, he will!"

"Then when the spy hear," breaks out Carmelita, "he ride to the west. You know what that means. Carrabijol is there or Canales with their cruel rancho lancers."

"How many?" asks Hampton.

"Oh, a hundred, perhaps. Perhaps more; too many for two men, no matter how brave. So as soon as the spy is out of sight, I ride—ride to save you, to tell you; that's all. And you've treated me cruelly. Now I go back."

"No, you won't go back!" commands Hampton, "not over that prairie alone, unattended. Believe me, I thank you."

"Bah, thank *her!*" cries Carmelita, waving her hand savagely at Miss Godfrey, who is gazing with distressed eyes upon the scene. Then she continues desperately: "It is but a three hours' ride. I must get back and be dancing my bolero in the Bella Union. Should the *espia* guess that I have warned you, it would be my death; not only his machete, but the knife of every bandit in Northern Mexico would be sharpened for my heart."

"Yes, I think you're about right," remarks Hampton after a moment's consideration. "If you're sure you can return?"

"I must. I dare not stay. Even you, my brave Texan Captain, couldn't protect me from Canales and Carrabijol, because you couldn't be everywhere. I must go. *Adios!* Next time a woman risks her life for you don't look at her coldly and say: 'Why do

you follow me?' even if my coming make the girl, whom you cannot look in the face, jealous of me, this Northern lily I had meant to betray. But when it gave my handsome Texan Ranger to death, then, *caramba*, I had a conscience!"

For one moment she makes a picture of passion tremendous, despairing, helpless, but very lovely, in the gaudy trappings of the Mexican horsewoman, as she sits like a portion of her steed, her eyes glowing yet sorrowful as they rest on Hampton, and sighs: "*Dios de mi alma, querido—querido mio!*" The next she cries savagely: "*Vamos!*" claps her spurs into her horse and dashes back along the trail towards the south.

CHAPTER X.

THE SMUGGLERS' TRAIL.

Having placed a burning brand between these two, Carmelita has flown away, leaving behind her the silence of the wilderness. Her sad, despairing voice has even awed Mr. Love. The only noise that strikes Miss Godfrey's ears is the cawing of a crow that seems enraged at human presence; as for the young lady's eyes, they are turned towards the ground, confusion and modesty almost make her sway in the saddle.

Fortunately now, hurried action compels Hampton to ignore all else but his young charge's safety. Life and death have precedence of even passion.

For a moment the Texan gazes shamefacedly after Carmelita and mutters to Harry: "Yes, it's best. The Greasers must not guess she has brought word to us. No danger will come to her. Canales's rancheros riding up from the southwest cannot possibly in-

tercept her. They'll not reach our trail for twenty miles ahead of where we are." He thinks for a moment, then cries: "Love, shin up one of those oak trees and see if you can still make out the Indian smoke signals to the north."

Harry, throwing himself off his horse, goes up a live oak as quickly as a squirrel, and a minute after reports: "Yes, I kin see 'em, though, of course, they're awful faint," and a moment after calls: "They are smoke signals sure as bacon is fat!"

Coming down the tree, he holds a hurried consultation a little apart with the Captain. At Hampton's words Miss Godfrey can hear Love chuckle: "Whaugh, won't it be slick, sicking a panther on a grizz'ly?"

"Quick, Harry," says the Captain, "ride over to the west and see if you can find the trail of the Indians. If they're coming up from the Rio Grande you should cross their track about six miles from here at the lowest ford on the Nueces. Find out their numbers and all about them. Meet me on the old Tobacco Smugglers' trail."

As the Ranger takes his pace rapidly towards the west, Hampton, now leading the pack mule, rides along, followed by Miss Godfrey and her maid.

The gait of their horses is sufficiently easy to permit Estrella some conversation with him. Though she cannot force her eyes to meet the Texan Captain's, she falters: "You're—you're riding towards the Indians. You dread the Mexican lancers more than you do them?"

"Well, it's about a toss-up," remarks Shaipe, "though the Comanches will trail us with more certainty than the Mexicans."

"Then why go towards them? Keep between them, run away from both."

"Oh, I want Canales's band to follow us."

"What?"

"Miss Godfrey, I propose to make Indian neutralize Greaser. In a few hours you'll see Mr. Love and me do it. Now, don't let the matter worry you; only be sure that no harm will ever come to you until Sharpe Hampton goes under."

The Ranger's face has a curious set expression on it, but trying to turn her mind from the dangers of her situation he gets to chatting to Estrella about the country through which they are passing, telling her of the old Tobacco Smugglers' trail he proposes to take; how it was made before the days of Texan independence by wild contrabandists coming from Matagorda down through Goliad of bloody memory to the Mexican towns on the Rio Grande, tobacco bearing a very high import duty from the Mexican Government. To her he relates some curious anecdotes of how the smugglers used to hire the alcaldes of the pueblos to let them sell their contraband cigars; that sometimes after the trade had been finished the alcalde, overcome by fear or conscience, denounced them to officers in command of the Mexican troops, who took away all the contrabandist's gains. In that case the smugglers generally knifed the alcalde," he laughs. "Now the trail is only used by cowboys.* In fact, Taylor's army has been supported for the most of the last five months by Mexican beef, a thing that doesn't make the Greasers feel very pleasantly towards us."

As they lope along he goes to pointing out honey trees to his exquisite companion, telling her how the

* "Cowboy" was the term at that time applied to the wild Texas man who rode down to the Rio Grande and looted Mexican stock, quite often massacring the vacqueros who tried to defend it. Their plunder was driven for sale to San Antonio and even at times supplied the market of Galveston.—*Editor.*

bee-hunters discover them by catching a few of the insects and watching their flights, which are always in straight lines, that where two lines of flight intersect there must be the bee tree. "That's the way Harry found that honey-comb, I reckon, that you enjoyed at lunch," he continues. "And look here! If you're lost, there's no danger of your starving in this part of the world. Two months from now there'll be lots of the finest plums and peaches. At present, here are all the strawberries you want; only look out for a sunny mound and put aside the long grass, and you'll get enough to support you for a day or two."

Then he gets to telling the young lady anecdotes of frontier life, describing to her the celebrated "Old Aunt Beck," who used to keep a tavern on the Smugglers' Trail, up towards Refugio, where the fight was made in the mission church by the Texan boys, "the little brothers" the men called them; that some of these lads hardly strong enough to carry a rifle held the mission yard against the assaults of Mexican Regulars under Urea, until compelled to draw off by Ward's orders, they had to leave three of the children who were wounded; and then the Greasers entered the churchyard and cut the little fellows' throats.

By this time the young lady has grown so interested in and so impressed by his conversation that she has forgotten Carmelita's insinuation, and her eyes again meet the Texan's, though once or twice they droop under his earnest gaze. In fact, the very incidents of travel compel intimacy with her cavalier.

Twice he stops and gets water for his charge; likewise taking the same good care of Zelma. Once, noting the china doll delicacy of the attendant, he asks, very seriously, if she can support the ride. "Yes, anything to save me from the Indians!" shudders the octo-

roon. But, unaccustomed to the saddle, Zelma has grown very weary.

As for Miss Godfrey, the horseback exercise she has almost daily taken in New York now does her very good service, and she rides on quite buoyantly and easily, though there is an eager anxiety in her as she notes the Texan's eyes every moment searching the horizon.

On one or two occasions he halts the young women and walks slightly in advance to some ridge in the prairie, where he can take observation, for he keeps their horses in the low swales, protected from view as much as possible by the mottes of timber, though the mustangs' hoofs in the soft soil make deep imprints.

"Can the lancers not follow our track very easily?" whispers Estrella, nervously, to him as they ride.

"Yes, I want them to."

"Oh, goodness!" She can't repress a slight shudder of her graceful shoulders.

"Canales coming after us will strike our trail about here, I think, two hours from now," Hampton observes, but most of the time his gaze is directed ahead of them. Once, assisting Miss Godfrey from the saddle, he leads her on foot into a copse of plum trees rather higher than the rest. Here, her mentor pointing cautiously to the north, she can just descry two faint columns of vapor a few miles apart from each other that are at times curiously intermittent. "The signals of the Comanches," he says. "Remember that whenever you see smoke coming up irregularly as if at times it were restrained, it probably means Indian signals. The accursed savages craftily hold their blankets over the fire and let the smoke out in puffs of varying sizes, telegraphing their movements to each other."

All the time their speed is kept at about a certain

rate, as if the Ranger meant to make a certain point at an exact time. About half an hour after this he turns his horse sharply to the north and says to Miss Godfrey: "The Smugglers' Trail."

"The Smugglers' Trail? I don't see anything of it."

"No, but it's easy enough to a frontiersman's eyes. Look, the old hoof marks off there in the dry adobe. Notice how the ground is worn down a little lower than the rest of the prairie, though the grass is growing on it? But see, here comes Love!" Hampton points two miles off towards the southwest.

"My, how he's riding!" cries the neophyte in woodcraft. "Carefully, too. He's turned off out of his course, because it would lead him into the open prairie and is coming round that island of pecans. Still, how did you first get your eye on him at so great a distance?"

"Why, didn't you see that herd of deer run out of that copse ahead of Harry?" remarks the Texan. "Wild animals by their movements often tell you what's going on. In this well-stocked country always distrust a trail upon which you see no game. It's almost a sure sign Indians are near it."

Ten minutes after Love overtakes them. "I found the Comanche trail going to the north," he says, tersely. "They spread at the crossin' of the Nueces into two bands, one about forty, t'other nigh onto thirty warriors. That's thar smoke signals up north."

"What time did they pass the river?"

"Just after sun up. The dew was on the grass when their ponies went over it, and no dew has fallen on it since. They've been down on the Rio Grande; got some captives with them, and plunder. Led horses were plentiful."

"Driving any cattle?" asks Hampton, sharply.

"Nary a hoof!"

"Thank God," answers the Texan. "Then they won't hesitate to come on the back trail. Did you see any Greaser sign?"

"Wall, I kinder think I did, Cap. Just after I left the Nueces I got a good view of open prairie to the south. On its horizon I caught the flicker of a lance-head or some bright arms, but oh, an awful long way off!"

"Then we're about midway between the Greasers and the Comanches," replies Hampton. "We'll travel on kinder slow." He looks up to the sun. "About three hours more of it! We'll give the Greasers just twenty-five miles to follow us. That'll make it about a little after dark when they overtake us, and then——"

"Whaugh," guffaws Harry, "if we kin do it."

"We've got to do it!" mutters Hampton, looking at his delicate charge. "She could never stand a ride of perhaps a hundred miles to distance the Comanches. Those Greaser lancers are a God's gift to us."

Soon Miss Godfrey, watching their movements, sees that time enters into all the calculations of these men. Several times as they journey on Hampton glances at the sun. About an hour before sunset he says: "Harry, now's our time. Miss Godfrey, you've got to travel fast. Go loping through the soft places. Make a good broad trail." Urged by him, the party proceed quite speedily for five miles.

All the time the Indian smokes are growing nearer. Getting beside Hampton, Estrella whispers with pallid lips: "We are riding right onto the Comanches. Don't you see their smoke—only five miles away?"

"Yes, they have been hunting or camped, taking a rest from their long foray. Their ponies'll be quite fresh this evening. So much the worse for our Greaser friends," says Sharpe dryly.

"So much the worse for us! You're—you're not

going nearer them?" pleads the girl in frightened tone.

"Well, just a little." But soon the Ranger doesn't seem to care to take any greater chances. "There may be some outlying braves hunting deer," he mutters. "Best no farther, Harry. Now turn around and race to that big live oak about three miles back. The one I pointed out to you about thirty yards from that canebrake chaparral," he whispers to Miss Godfrey.

"But the Indians—they will discover our trail, they will follow us."

"I want them to follow us."

"What!"

"Don't get excited. Watch!" For the first time this grim day the Captain chuckles slightly.

They have raced back to the live oak tree. "Now, Harry, hide our tracks!" he commands.

With this the Rangers spring off their horses and throw all their blankets and horse clothes on the ground, not even exempting Miss Godfrey's. With these they carpet the seventy-five feet of ground from the trail to the canebrake. They have selected the spot very carefully. It is one where there is but little or no grass to be pressed down.

Over these blankets each horse is carefully led and secreted in the rank canebrake of prickly pears, cacti and mesquite bushes that borders a swamp through which runs a little stream, probably a tributary to the Aransas.

"Now, Harry, the fire before it is too dark for both Indians and Greasers to see the smoke. Put plenty of wet wood on."

Mr. Love, gliding out over the blankets carefully, takes off his moccasins and travels quickly to a place just off the Smugglers' Trail that might be selected by a careless camping party.

From here in a minute or two rises a high column of

dense smoke easily discernible in the red rays of the setting sun.

"Mercy, it will bring both lancers and Indians upon us!" whispers Miss Godfrey.

"Yes," says Hampton, with a grim smile, "both'll come racing to it."

"And then, whaugh!" chuckles Wild Harry, who has returned to them, obliterating with great circumspection every indication of their movements, even blowing up with the breath of his lips the blades of grass as each blanket is removed and concealed in the canebrake.

"Now, quick, take me from here!" begs Estrella.

"And run into that party of Indians coming from across the prairie," Hampton points to the further smoke signal. "No; we must stay here till Comanche and Greaser get to work on each other; then light out."

"You think they will do it?"

"Just as sure as the Mexicans are lookin' for your purty face and the Comanches is huntin' for scalps!" grins Wild Harry.

So in the seclusion of the canebrake comes to Miss Godfrey the agony of suspense. Shuddering at each noise of the wild wood, this delicate girl, who but a month before had been the belle of Washington Square and University Place dances in far-away New York, cowers in the tangled chaparral awaiting the coming of barbarous enemies on one side and bloodthirsty savages on the other.

As she crouches there the shadows of the very last sun ray falling through the matted leaves and briars of the jungle, the thing would seem a horrible phantasy to her did she not hear the sharp clicks of gun locks as the men who guard her prepare their weapons for immediate use.

Suddenly Hampton whispers: "Hoofs at a distance. Muffle our horses. A single neigh will betray us."

So the two men blanket the heads of the animals, who have grown strangely restive, holding the horses' nostrils tightly while they do it.

She listens again, and Wild Harry mutters below his breath: "Hoofs t'other way! Hear 'em comin'?——"

"Yes, from the north, unshod," whispers Hampton. Then he half laughs: "Both gangs of devils racing for a fire whose smoke shows it has been made by people innocent of the backwoods and easy prey."

By this time the gloom is such Estrella cannot distinguish details at a distance, but the frontier senses of the men beside her do. "By Goliah, the Injuns'll be here fust!" mutters Wild Harry.

"Yes, but with Comanche caution they've halted," replies the Captain. "Ah, they've sent a scout ahead!"

And Estrella sees in the sunset glow the gleaming figure of a naked savage in full war paint, with lance at a carry and short bow ready for use, as he lopes down the trail, looking cautiously to right and left of him.

Even in the half light something just at the point they have left the trail seems unnatural to the observing eye of the savage. He checks his horse suddenly, and he and his steed become a statue in the red afterglow of the prairie sunset.

"Shall I take him?" whispers Wild Harry, his long Kentucky rifle sighted for the Indian's heart.

For answer Hampton puts restraining hand upon him; then mutters: "Thank God!" For the clanking of metal horse trappings, the rattle of Mexican cavalry accoutrements and the quick hoof sounds of the rancharo squadron now catch the Indian's attention. Not over a second he listens; then they can see

him glide silently back, like a spectre horseman in the gloaming.

"By gum, the Greasers come just in time to save our bacon!" chuckles Love.

Straining her ears, Estrella catches Spanish voices in excitable execration as the rancheros, arriving at the camp-fire, discover that their prey has fled from them. Though it is dark now, the trail is an easy one, and they come dashing on, chattering recklessly in their Latin way, yet some muttered *carambas* indicate their cruel intent.

"By the Eternal," says Hampton, "the Comanches have ambushed them. They'll get it good!"

Now the girl shudders and half screams as she sees through the gloom of the evening the shining forms of the savages on horseback closing in like spectres round the rancheros. Then she claps her hands to her ears, for greeting them is that horrid yell which has proclaimed death, outrage and torture to many a Texas maid in her log cabin home, the wild Comanche-war cry! She sees the braves in their war paint driving their bloody spears into the Mexicans, whom they despise yet slaughter. Over this ring out the loud reports of escopetas and pistols, the clash of steel on lance, mingled with Spanish *carajos*, the twang of Indian bows, the hissing of Indian arrows and the dull thud of horses' hoofs as they charge upon the prairie.

Then all dies away in a horrid jumble going rapidly towards the south, leaving behind only the moans of the dying and the shrieks of scalped and mangled wretches.

"Blowed if the Yaller bellies ain't flyin' from the Red bellies! Hope they've scalped Carrabijol!" guffaws Harry.

"Quick, let us go!" commands Hampton.

At his words Miss Godfrey finds herself lifted into

her saddle and her horse rushed through the canebrake into the creek; Harry, following after, doing the same with Zelma.

To her escort Estrella shudders: "You are going south. You are following the Indians."

"Yes."

"The Comanches may come back."

"The Comanches *will* come back. Trust the Indians when they get through slaughtering Carrabijol's men to return to find out who lighted that prairie fire! They're sure to discover our trail, so I don't want them to know which way we have travelled. If they guess we are going north, those crafty demons will intercept us at the fords of Blanco Creek."

So they dash into the brook, heading to the south, and travel down it for some hundred yards; then their horses are turned in midstream and hurried back, keeping well in the current. They have passed the place they entered the stream, and now they dash through the waters of the swampy creek for two miles, Miss Godfrey shuddering as alligators flop off their logs and moccasin snakes hiss from the cypress trees, until Hampton, finding a proper place, takes them carefully out through the canebrake into the open prairie.

"Now ride fast!" commands the Ranger Captain. "Those red devils are sure to find our trail before morning. Ride! We must reach the crossing of Blanco Creek before those painted centaurs get there!"

And they do ride! Miss Godfrey, almost reeling in her saddle from fatigue, finds that the horseback exercise she had taken each day in New York helps her, but soon a faint cry from behind indicates her maid can ride no more.

"Reckon we've got to tie the wench on her mustang!" remarks Love, looking at the almost fainting octoroon.

"She's too far gone for that; it would kill her," dis-sents Sharpe.

Then he springs into his saddle with Zelma in his clutch, who is so worn out she cannot speak; and so, carrying one of the despised race right tenderly in his strong arms, he rides into her mistress's heart. Though Estrella is nigh fainting herself, she gives her cavalier a look that, could he see it in the gloom, would make him think that midnight trail through swamps, over prairies, amid thorny chaparral, was one of the aisles of Paradise.

But not guessing this and anxious for her safety, he whispers to his charge: "You can keep up! You *must* keep up! We have got to ford the Blanco before I give you rest, brave girl!"

"Don't fear, I'll keep up. Who could flinch with you to aid her?" she half moans under the unceasing travail of her galloping steed.

But, despite her words, this beautiful and delicate neophyte of the border is so exhausted she scarce has her senses as the hoofs of their horses splash through a running stream, and Mr. Love says: "Whaugh, beat the Injuns this time—the crossing of the Blanco!"

What precautions her escorts take at the ford to hide their trail Miss Godfrey is too exhausted to discover. She only knows that some half hour afterwards she sees, as in a dream, their mustangs drawn up in some leafy covert, and Hampton passing Zelma from his saddle to Mr. Love, who carries the fainting girl away.

Then the frontiersman springs off his horse and takes her in his arms as tenderly as he would a wood nymph, and bears her as if she were a precious thing, to a couch of boughs and leaves, upon which he has thrown her blankets. Here, sinking down, she gives a sigh of exhaustion, yet content, as she watches

this man of iron, with pistols prepared and eyes alert, guarding her slumbers, to make them safe from man and beast, amid the dangers of the prairies.

As she goes to sleep she whispers to herself that sweet Spanish word she heard Carmelita use: "*Querido.*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE GLORY OF HIS FIGHTING.

The midday hush of the prairie is around her, its hot sun is blazing down upon her when Estrella reopens her eyes to a day of strange passion with its astounding joys and curious fears. For a moment she looks about her astonished, then physical anguish makes her remember. Every joint in her delicate body seems to have been racked and made stiff. She who had been considered a dashing equestrienne on Harlem Lane, New York, discovers that the wild, long night ride of the prairies has been altogether too cruel a travail for her fair limbs.

But bodily suffering is effaced by the mental ecstasy: "How near I am to my dear father." Then through her mind runs a stronger emotion, a stranger joy: "He is by me! He is watching over me!" She does not dare to ask herself "Who?" but glances out timidly from her leafy bower upon a little prairie surrounded by thickets of plum, Osage-orange, oak and pecan, where their caballada is grazing contentedly on the rich buffalo grass, and over which Mr. Love, rifle in hand, is keeping an alert eye.

All through this day it is apparent that very great precautions are used for her safety. Her food is given to her cold by Hampton, who apologizes: "I dare not

have a fire lighted. These redskins are about us. Their accursed eyes see everything on the prairie. We must lie close, for if you could travel, your maid could not. She has not been inured to horseback exercise." This is too true; poor Zelma can hardly move at all.

Every moment the careful, tireless watch of the frontier is being kept about her. Miss Godfrey has heard Hampton whisper to Love: "If we are surprised these girls are incapable of taking the saddle. Therefore, keep the lookout of your life, old man!"

"Bet yer gizzard!" has answered Wild Harry promptly.

Once she has been cautioned by the Captain of Rangers: "Remember, the Comanches are about!" for Estrella has wandered timidly away into some cottonwoods and willows which mask a little stream that trickles through the prairie to join the waters of the Blanco.

"I—I just wanted to wash my face," she mutters.

"Shucks, ye'd look purty enough if ye didn't wash at all!" Mr. Love has remarked authoritatively.

And, fortunately, Miss Godfrey's beauty is that of Nature, or it would all have been torn from her by the wild ride of the night before; even now her fair cheeks are covered with dust, and her lovely hair, having escaped from its confinement, is hanging in tangled curls about her, well below her waist.

"It's—it's hardly fair, Captain Hampton," she says, bashfully but archly, "to look at me before I've made a frontier toilet."

For he is gazing with tender commiseration at his exhausted charge. He brings her some wild flowers he has plucked in the glade and places carefully a saddle for her to sit upon. She is pleased to see, he can't keep his eyes off her. This is not to be wondered at, as passion has made her bright face exquisitely ten-

der, and the masses of brown hair unconventionally but effectively secured about the graceful head permit the sun to shine through their loose bands and tint them golden.

But all the time the girl notices that, though Sharpe Hampton apparently wishes to linger in her presence, there is a nervous restlessness in this man of energetic temperament. It is not fear of Indian pursuit, she is sure, for in making arrangements with Love about this matter the Ranger's tone is cool and incisive.

Perceiving that his eyes at times rest wistfully on their horses, she murmurs, a slight reproach in her voice: "Ah, you're anxious to get on your journey."

"I am, for military reasons," he answers. "But I'm more anxious to put you safe at your father's hacienda."

"Then I won't detain you. I can ride; I know I can ride. Just let me run about a little and I'll be as active as a fawn!" asserts Miss Godfrey.

But Hampton, looking at the reclining Zelma, whose well-moulded yet languid Creole limbs have not been inured to horseback exercise, answers: "I believe you could, but your girl can't."

"Zelma shall!" cries Estrella. Striding to the recumbent octoroon, she speaks in mistress tones: "You must travel!" but finds that Nature is stronger than her commands, and her slave cannot.

Then come the long hours of waiting, Hampton and Love from points of vantage carefully watching the prairie.

Gazing at them Estrella smuggles Sharpe's flowers into the bosom of her tunic and grows petulant, as she gets comparatively little of her cavalier's attentions, for which now she is beginning to long—yet dread; dread—because she fears herself. She is alarmed at the strange misery in her heart as she thinks of Carmelita's passion for the frontier Captain, and shudders:

"That dancing girl saved his life, while I only put danger on it!"

Wild Harry happening to be near her, she diffidently whispers to him: "Did Carmelita's warning out on the prairie, the one she risked her life to bring, save him from the Mexican lancers yesterday?"

"Save who?"

"Why—why, Captain Hampton, of course!"

"Shucks, no," answers the frontiersman. "We'd expected that danger all along and allowed fur it before we started out from Corpus Christi. We talked of it agin when we see'd the Greaser at the ferry with his horse marked with a South Rio Grande brand. Of course, we didn't guess that a war band of Comanches was upon the trail ahead of us, but the minute we saw their smoke signals we'd fixed our plans just exactly how to make the Greasers and redskins wipe each other out."

"Ah, then Carmelita didn't save the Captain's life?" she asks, quivering with jealous eagerness.

"Nary a leetle bit," answers Wild Harry, confidently. "Whaugh, Sharpe Hampton ain't the kind of critter as needs any one to save his scalp in an Injun scrimmage. He kin take care of himself. Didn't he once all alone upon the San Saba save two little children from a whole tribe of Kiowas? Why, darn it, what's the matter with ye?" For Miss Godfrey has turned away, her eyes full of tears, but lighted up with a strange, wistful delight.

Shortly after blushes burn up the tears. The octo-roon has looked at Sharpe with grateful eyes ever since he carried her through the ride of the previous night. Chancing to be in attendance upon Miss Godfrey, and noting the Texan's gentleness in handling the horses as he makes some change in their pasturage, Zelma

suddenly exclaims: "Oh, if a man like Captain Hampton could be my master!"

"Captain Hampton! How could he be your master?" asks Estrella, astonished.

"Why—why, by marrying you, of course, Miss 'Strella. Sometimes I've thought as he looked at you his eyes meant——"

But her mistress stays her with a half scream of bashful rage: "Not another word! My Heaven, if he hears you!" She almost staggers from Zelma, the red blood pouring up through her face till her very skin seems to burn. For an hour the words of her maid make Miss Godfrey strangely cold to the Captain of Rangers whenever he approaches her, lured even from his duty of guarding her by the desire to look upon her bright face.

But soon coldness is effaced by a new wild joy. Before she had seen her Texan cavalier use the strategy of the backwoods and the arts of the frontier to save her from savage enemies. Now she has the glory of beholding him fight for her!

Hampton is seated by Miss Godfrey, telling her how he hopes on the morrow to put her in her father's arms. "His hacienda is but forty miles away," he says. As the words leave his lips, Estrella sees his whole appearance change. His eyes, that had been soft and tender, suddenly light up with the cold gleam with which he had cowed the Mississippi gambler, only more deadly, more awful.

To her he says, as he forces her down behind the bundles of the pack mule: "Use your pistols!"

Turning, she utters an affrighted cry. In the middle of the glade, in full war paint, mounted on his war pony like a statue of bronze, the sun lighting up his gleaming skin and glittering arms, is a young Comanche brave.

He is setting an arrow in his bow. But as he draws the feathered shaft to its head a rifle cracks sharp as a whip from the outlying thicket, and, with a stream of blood spouting from his breast, the warrior, uttering one wild yell that echoes through the timber, falls from his horse and dies.

"Had to shoot this time! The skunk see'd us. I'll take his pelt!" cries Love, and springs out into the open. But a band of eight braves comes dashing round the mesquite bushes and in a second Harry is on the ground pinned by a Comanche lance through his arm.

To run to his aid would be too late for Harry's life. So now the Ranger Captain, standing like a statue, gives out death. To the report of his revolving pistol the savage raising scalping knife over Love falls dead. Then three times in quick succession his deadly marksmanship shows itself in three falling warriors who sink from their horses.

Another dies to the crack of Love's pistol, who, lying upon the ground, has fired again. "Whaugh, that sickened 'em!" screams Harry, as the other three turn and dash madly off, though one leaves an arrow driven through Love's wounded arm.

"Not one must get back to their band!" cries Hampton as he seizes the riata of his steed. Springing upon the bare back of the horse, armed only with the pistols and bowie-knife in his belt, he dashes off, calling to Harry: "See to the Indian mustangs!"

"Follow him! Follow! He is going after *three!*" cries the girl frantically to Love, who with the arrow still skewering his arm, is hastily shooting the riderless war ponies. One of these has run out upon the main prairie. Pointing to it, Wild Harry says: "If it gets back to the Comanches, it's track will guide 'em to us. Follow it and kill it, for yer life."

"First let me bind up your wounds. You'll bleed to death," falters Estrella.

"No, I'll tend to myself. Git out on that prairie. Kill that horse. Ye've pistols in your belt. Kill the Injur's horse. That's our lives."

Wildly excited, she runs out upon the prairie, and creeping within range of the Comanche war pony that has stopped to crop some pleasant grasses, for a moment cannot kill the beautiful creature. Then murmuring: "It is his life as well as mine!" and remembering the marksmanship he had taught her, she raises her revolver and slaughters the beast with three nervous, trembling shots.

But her pursuit has taken her well out on the prairie. From here, she can see Hampton gaining stride by stride on the three Indians, for his horse is fresh, and theirs are tired by the war trail. For just a moment she gives a shudder of apprehension. Comanches are no cowards. Noting but one man following them, the three warriors turn. Even at the distance, she can hear the twanging of their bows and see the war arrows flashing through the sunlight.

She runs frantically towards them, her pistol may aid Sharpe! Probably the embarrassment of her presence would give him death, but fortunately the distance is too great for her to reach them. Even now she sees Hampton spring off his horse, standing behind it and making a pivot of it as the Indians circle round him. Resting his long dragoon pistol over the animal's shoulder, he takes three long shots.

The heavy revolver does its work. One Indian falls dead; another desperately wounded is half-dragged by his pony into a mesquite thicket; then the other flies. She sees him speed off over the prairie followed by Sharpe, till pursued and pursuer pass out of sight around one of the timber mottes of the prairie.

And she stands gazing—gazing so eagerly, she never notices the slight waving ripple that gradually draws nearer through the long prairie grass which rises almost to her waist.

After a few minutes that seem an age, one man comes riding back. Recognizing him, Estrella gives a sigh of joy, the tears coursing down her cheeks as she is thanking God.

But not approaching her he gallops hurriedly into the chaparral, where the wounded Indian's mustang had dragged the warrior. A moment later he dashes out of the thicket, and urging his horse to its full speed, flies straight towards her across the prairie, calling: "Use your pistol! Quick, your pistol!"

"On what?"

Suddenly the girl sees on what. Rising before her, wounded but deadly, is a Comanche brave. Blood is dripping from his naked, painted body. All he wants is her young life before he dies. Half crawling, half staggering, he drags himself towards her, his eyes malevolent, his knife upraised.

With trembling fingers the girl shoots, and misses; then shoots again, but doesn't stay him. What is another flesh wound to a Comanche with a scalp in his very hand?

She is fumbling in her belt for her other pistol, and trying to pray. The brute's hot, foetid breath is on her face, his knife uplifted, when to the hoarse bark of the Ranger's big revolver, the savage falls groveling at her feet, the blood spouting from his head.

Hampton has shot from the back of his mustang at full speed, the impetus of his horse takes him past her. As he passes, Estrella finds herself plucked from the prairie and gathered in his arms in front of him. Then they go dashing on.

"To save you, I had to let the war pony of that dead

Indian get away. A riderless horse will tell the Comanches that their party has been slaughtered. Vengeance will give them speed. We've got to light out. Hang on to me while I take you into camp." These are quick words as they fly across the prairie.

So nestling to him, she rides in his arms, blushes on her cheeks and whispered thanks on her lips for the life he has given her. Through her light fawn-skin tunic he can feel the quick throbbing of her rounded bosom. It sets his heart to beating also.

Her face confronts his. Her eyes gleam into his, then droop bashfully, and her head with all its wealth of soft brown hair that blows out in the light prairie wind, falls on his shoulder. The Ranger's hand, which had been very steady as he pulled trigger on Indian braves, quivers as he holds to him the dainty body of this graceful creature, who enchants him and makes him tremble with a tender passion.

A short, blissful ride. Neither speaks, but the girl's head hangs lower and lower on his shoulder, and his clasp is more possessive about the slight waist and exquisite limbs that nestle closer and closer to him. Still their lips are silent, for between their beating hearts are the words of the young dragoon: "Keep my loved one safe, Hampton, for it is my life."

So he gallops into camp, but doesn't pass Estrella to Harry as he had done the octoroon girl the night before; for he slides off his horse's back, still bearing a loved burden in his arms as if he could not give it up. Though even as he dismounts, he is speaking rapidly: "Quick, Harry, how is your wounded arm?"

"All right. Zelma did a good job binding it up. Only a flesh wound."

"Then get up the horses! One of the Comanche ponies escaped me. We must light out." And the

Captain goes to packing the mule, for Love says: "I kin bridle the plugs, anyway."

"Now, Miss Godfrey!" whispers Hampton. This time he doesn't refuse the little foot that is extended to him, but swings her into her saddle.

"Quick, Zelma!"

But the octoroon, with the languor of her race, half sobs: "I cannot go. I'm too tired. My limbs ache so."

Then Miss Godfrey discovers a new feature in the Texas Captain. He says: "Girl, you have got to ride. Now Love's wounded, my arms must be free. Up at once! Your legs will get easier with exercise."

But Zelma hesitating, with a single gesture he swings her into the saddle, commanding: "Ride! Ride, or, by Heaven, I'll leave you to be scalped. Ride! You've got to ride!"

Then the cavalcade dash off.

Turning in his saddle, he says to Love: "Harry, if Zelma falls off her horse, we must tie her on, that's all."

Then he gallops by Miss Godfrey's side, asking her anxiously: "You feel strong enough?"

"Strong enough? Oh," she whispers buoyantly, "I could ride in your"—her face grows red as the prairie roses—"by your side all night." Yet every stride of her mustang bringing her nearer her father, makes her heart grow heavier; she is approaching the place where they must part for the present, for now she has linked this man, who has saved her from savage enemies, with her future.

Perchance as they ride along, Hampton talks himself further into her good will. He seems to have lost all of that quaint Southern dignity that had made him formal during their first intercourse. Anxious to make her forget the dangers of pursuit and the fatigues of

enforced horsemanship, he tells her stories of the border, of Davy Crockett, Bowie and Milam of the War of Independence, of Gillespie, Sam Walker, and Jack Hays of Indian fame, of the great fight on the head waters of the Guadalupe, sometimes called that of the Pinto Trace, wherein fourteen Texan Rangers under the command of Hays, had driven eighty Indians for six miles, slaying nearly half of them, with a loss of three men killed and four wounded.

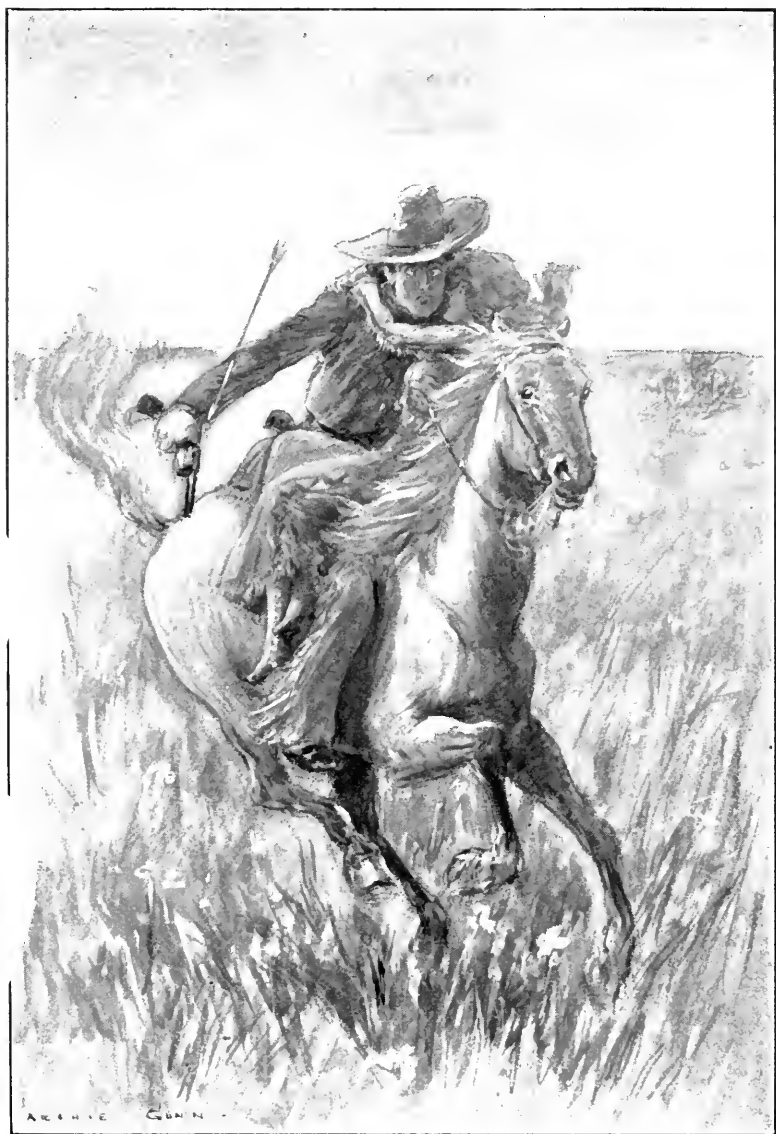
Likewise he describes the ill-fated Mier Expedition, where he in company with two hundred and seventy Texans, after killing seven hundred Mexicans, surrendered from lack of ammunition; how recaptured after their attempt to escape, they had been decimated by order of Santa Anna; a gourd having been placed before them filled with beans, each one representing a man's life, nine white to one black, which meant death; how he had drawn, by the mercy of God, a white bean; how old Blackburn, to whom fate had given one of the black beans, had jeeringly called out: "Boys, I always draw a prize in every lottery," and had gone laughingly to stand up against the adobe wall and die.

To this last the girl listens, her eyes lighted up wild and horrified, as she thinks, trembling at her own emotion: "If *he* had drawn a black bean."

Noting her nervousness, Sharpe whispers reassuringly: "But a few miles more to your father's hacienda."

"And you?"

"Then—then I go on to San Antonio. No—no, I cannot stay." For she has said some pressing words of hospitality. "Duty calls me. I must ride through the night," he answers. "But should you want me at any time in stress like the present, if I am not dead or across the border fighting for my country, send for me,



A KNIGHT OF THE PRAIRIE



and if horseflesh will get me there——” His face tells her the rest.

Yet during this ride, at times a weird and uncanny horror seems to smite Hampton's very soul. Estrella has noticed this ever since he encountered the Comanches. “You—you're not sad about the Indians you killed. It was to save my life,” she whispers; then is horrified at the jeering yet awful laugh which is his answer.

“Sorry at killing those red devils?” he breaks out. “Sorry?” He bows his head upon the saddle, and tears run down between his brown hands. “Oh, you don't know my life, or you'd not ask me that,” he mutters. “You have perhaps wondered why I haven't all the rough diction of the prairie, that I sometimes speak as people living in the cities. I was educated at college for two years, and then went back from my sophomore year to our plantation in Shelby County, Texas, where I had a loving father, a dear mother and a sweet sister. When I arrived there a bleakened prairie greeted me where there had been gardens and a cottage with woodbines and Virginia creepers climbing over it, a desert where there had been a happy home, and that was all—all! No living thing, but the hoof tracks of the war ponies told the massacre of my family. Since then I have been alone. That's the reason, Miss Godfrey, why my name has been connected with so many bloody deeds done on this frontier. To protect other men's homes from these red devils, I entered the Texan Rangers. I never have taken life but to save life. I am not a duellist like a good many of our boys are—if I can help it. Though no man, I think, can say Sharpe Hampton ever turned his back on him. Anyway, that's my history. You don't think my hand has wanton blood upon it?”

“What! When it has protected me this day?” And

the girl, leaning over her saddle, extends her own hand to the Texan Ranger. It is gripped so that she screams from very agony.

"Oh, forgive me!" he pleads.

"Why, you can grip it again," says Estrella, bravely, and extends her delicate fingers once more; then gives a little, agitated cry as the tenderest kiss is placed upon it. Fortunately the night is dark.

They are riding through the prairies that are opening. The waters of the Atascosa Creek, heavily timbered, are on their left. A light gleams on the prairie. "It is one of the outlying cabins of your father's settlements," he says, almost sadly.

"Have we ridden thirty-five miles?" she asks, astonished.

"Not yet. Your father's acres are pretty numerous. But we've come very quickly—yet not too fast." His face is serious; he cries suddenly: "Quicken your pace. Urge your horse."

"Why, we're nearly there."

"Listen to the Comanche hoof-beats behind us! Quick, Harry, whip up Zelma's mustang!" As her steed springs under her, Estrella can hear the sharp sounds of the quirta as it is plied behind her on the tired horse.

But now more lights open before them. They have dashed past several log cabins, and Love, spurring up from the rear, cries: "Those skunks have quit at the lights of the settlement."

"Yes, but drive on!" cries Hampton. "You never know when a Comanche's beaten."

So they rush on again, and are just in time. To the right are pattering hoofs trying to head them off. But now, riding past Virginia rail fences, there is a block-house, at which they are challenged, and the Ranger cries: "Comanches behind us, boys!"

A scattering volley, and the ponies' hoof-sounds pass away into the darkness of the prairie from which they came. Indians do not often face palisades with rifle-fire behind them.

A moment later there is quite a crowd about Estrella and her party, rough men, some with German accent, and two or three negroes. But on hearing who it is, the garrison of the block-house set up a yell and drive Miss Godfrey nearly frantic with joy, for they tell her her father is at the hacienda, having arrived there the day before.

"You must stay and let him thank you," Estrella whispers. "Only to-night; to-morrow you can go on."

"No, Love goes on now. Though tough as whipcord, you've seen his pluck, he is a wounded man and I must follow him and see he gets in to San Antonio de Bexar safe. When the regiment rides down—they'll be coming soon, en route for the Rio Grande, I'll try to run over and—and see you."

They still are at the block-house, arranging that Zelma be sent on by wagon, Miss Godfrey's maid being utterly exhausted.

Love, who has been looking on uneasily, now says in wild, nervous tone: "No further, Cap. You know I can't stand the looks of this 'ere place. Over thar, beyond that cross timber, my poor old Mammy lived. Let me get on to San Antonio, as we agreed, and—good luck to ye, Miss Godfrey, and—"

"And," says the girl, "whenever you need a friend or want a resting-place, remember Estrella Godfrey. Come back. This place was the home of your boyhood. It will be your home as long as I have any influence with my father, and I think I'll have a good deal," she adds in radiant confidence; then breaks out, her soul in her eyes: "My father! Hampton, think, my father! Let us get along; my father's waiting for me. My

father, whose face I will not know, whose kisses I never remember."

Then the two ride on together, alone. "Think—think," says the girl, in excited gratitude, as their horses pace side by side, "if I had not met you."

"It would have been to me as if the sun had never risen," mutters Hampton, half to himself.

"You said if I wanted you, to send for you," remarks Estrella, pensively; then suddenly asks, half archly, half indignantly: "You wouldn't come unless I sent for you?"

The Texan Captain half turns to her in his saddle; but answers resolutely: "No, never until I'm wanted!" for the words of young Pelham, the dragoon, are yet in Hampton's mind and still his tongue.

Then wounded pride keeps the young lady silent as, coming through fruit lands and passing big cotton fields and huge cattle corrals, and being challenged by two or three sentinels, who are all alert, for the place has almost the appearance of a frontier fortification, they ride up to the strong adobe walls and heavy timber doors of the hacienda of Live Oaks, and after some parley are admitted.

In the big courtyard, half patio, half garden, a man dressed partly in the costume of the prairies, partly in that of the city, comes hurriedly to meet them. To him, Hampton cries: "Jim Godfrey, I've brought your daughter!"

And Estrella screams: "Father!"

At this the man, muttering: "Daughter!" and holding out his arms, the girl falls into them, and greets him with tender kisses, sobbing: "Thank God, at last my dear father!" Then, for he has only saluted her forehead, she says archly yet lovingly: "My lips, papa, my lips!" and holds up for his caress two rosebuds made sweet by a daughter's happy affection.

From this sacred meeting, the Ranger steps a few paces away. Some minutes afterwards, despite the hospitable protests of the head of this great estate and his thanks for bearing his child to him, he says, shortly: "Military duty won't let me stay. Taylor has marched for the Rio Grande, and Hays's Regiment must go after him!"

To this Godfrey cries: "Hurrah, there'll be big Government contracts and lots of profit!"

Wondering how the father can think of pelf with his exquisite daughter just given to his arms and her first kisses warm upon his lips, Sharpe turns away. Undeterred by even the young lady's detaining grasp and faltered thanks and entreating eyes, he wrings her hand and mutters: "Farewell!" But in the very archway of the hacienda he looks back. The lights from the adobe building illumine the woman of his love, nestling in her father's arms and prattling how she has come from the world to make his frontier fireside less lonely.

It is the vision of a home he will never have. With a sigh the Ranger Captain turns his horse through the heavy gates and spurs away into the darkening night on the lone trail over the prairie to San Antonio de Bexar.

BOOK IV.
MISS GODFREY'S FATHER.

CHAPTER XII.

"MY DEAR DADDY!"

That evening Miss Godfrey goes in very happily on her father's arm to supper. This has been hastily spread late at night. To him she says, her eyes lighting up as they sit down: "For the first time at the head of your table; my dear daddy."

It is a profuse meal, though served in homely frontier style by a bright-faced mulatto girl called Milly. Over it she tells her father of her journey from New York and her adventures after leaving Copus Christi.

Perhaps her account of the Ranger Captain's care and guardianship of her is slightly too fervid. During this her father looks at her once or twice with so perturbed a countenance that she says hastily: "You don't think I did wrong in coming across the prairies alone with a frontiersman. You know it was to see you. I had got so far, I felt that I couldn't wait any longer for your kisses." Then she questions, a diffident confusion on her features: "You don't think I'm too grateful to Captain Hampton?"

"Oh, that's all right. Your journey's over; that's the end of it," remarks Godfrey. "You're—you're too tired, my—my child." There is a slight hesitancy in his expression. "Best go up-stairs. Zelma, your girl,

has arrived by wagon. What you want is to sleep for a day or two," he suggests.

"Oh, I'll wake up to-morrow, for my first day with my father!" Putting her arms about him, the girl kisses him tenderly, and runs up-stairs, where she finds that a plain chamber in this backwoods house has been made as pretty as possible for her use. It is handsomely furnished for the frontier, has flowers in jugs upon its tables. She has also noticed in the sitting-room a piano, that has been purchased for her in New Orleans and sent up by wagon from Matagorda.

From her window she looks out upon the prairie to the west and sighs to the night wind: "Hampton!" Then goes to bed, and, though worn out, sleeps a sleep that is not always dreamless, for in it are Indians and war whoops and rifle-shots, and she rides again in the Ranger's arms on his bareback steed; that blissful ride when he had plucked her from the death that seemed to claim her.

The next morning Estrella awakens to find the bright sun lighting up her pretty chamber, and to sniff the perfume of flowers that Milly is placing about it.

The wench, with a little salute, says: "Missie, Massa said as how he wouldn't expect yo' to breakfast dis mornin'; he 'lowed yo' might be too used up."

"Not too tired to meet my father!" cries Estrella, and springs out of bed. Smelling the beautiful flowers with which her room is decorated, she murmurs to herself: "Daddy! He thought of me this morning. He has plucked these himself."

In the adjoining room her maid is working on the little wardrobe brought across the prairie. "Zelma, is my muslin frock ironed?" she asks. "It must have been mussed fearfully on the mule." Miss Godfrey, always feminine, though she has brought with her only

one gown, has selected one that she feels sure will make her look well in her father's eyes.

She glances at her watch and cries: "Mercy, nearly twelve o'clock. Papa will be waiting for me!" To her maid she says: "You seem tired, Zelma. Just make me pretty for my father; then take a rest," and laughs: "No more an Indian maiden! Dad shall see how his daughter looked civilized."

Miss Godfrey, her eyes full of love, trips down-stairs and pouts to find that her father has ridden out five hours before to look at his cotton fields.

A bright idea flits through her mind, and calling Milly, she goes to work at domestic matters. From these she springs, her face radiant, as, about an hour after, Godfrey comes riding up to the house and throws his reins to a negro boy. Running out to him, she cries: "Come in to lunch, papa dear, and see what a housekeeper your daughter is."

Putting a kiss on his lips, she leads him into the dining-room, which had been quite homely in style and furnishing, but has now been made under her hands bright with flowers, and its table adorned with snowy linen. "What do you think of a civilized meal?" she says, proudly.

"Ah, you expect company?" asks Godfrey, a curious nervousness in his tone, his eyes opening at unwonted luxury, for till this time he had lived in almost backwoods manner, his bearing being that of a man unaccustomed to the world, his face one that has borne the brunt of outdoor life. His clothes and manner also indicate he is a plain frontier planter.

This only makes his daughter more tender to him. She cries: "No, only you! Nothing is too good for you. Look. Prairie roses on the table, and I've had everything cooked that Milly said you liked."

So they sit down, she radiant and he quite well content.

But the meal being over, and Milly having gone away, she says, archly standing before him: "Take a good look at me, dad. What do you think of me civilized, papa? See; silk stockings and slippers!" She displays, in daughter's freedom, dazzling ankles exquisite in their moulding and dainty feet decked in Parisian style; then suddenly gasps: "You—you're not *ashamed* of me?" For a red flush has flown over her father's face and there is a somewhat abashed look in his deep eyes as he gazes on his daughter's loveliness.

"No," he stammers, "but I—I was afraid, with your fine dresses and high-falutin' things, you might be ashamed of your frontier daddy." Apparently almost forcing himself, he glances at the beautiful figure the girl makes before him, favoring with a little paternal pat her superb shoulders, that gleam white as marble under the sheer muslin of her corsage, as he continues: "I was afraid you might put on shines with me and be hard to control, and——"

"Oh, no, father," she says simply, her eyes lighting up with devoted love. "Understand me, I intend to give a daughter's full and entire duty to you."

At this declaration Godfrey's face becomes easier; he takes Estrella's little, shell-like ear between his big thumb and strong forefinger, gives it a slight pinch and laughs: "Then be very careful, miss."

Flushing, yet pleased at the familiarity, for until this time her father had been somewhat more formal with her, she whispers: "That's the way I want you to treat me; just as if I had been brought up here on the plantation and had always been under your charge and accustomed to obey you. That's it, dad, accus-

toned to obey you—accustomed *always* to obey you. For you will give me your guidance and direction.”

“And correction, eh, my little girl?” he observes, his tone having grown quite confident and dominating.

Gazing into his eyes, she sees that her father will exercise the authority she has so freely yet gracefully conceded, and in the exuberant love that she has kept waiting for him all these years, she is happy in the familiarity of his control and dominion.

“Yes, when I need it, I suppose,” she murmurs, and hangs her head bashfully and nestles to him a little. “But I am going to be a very good girl,” she cries in sweet enthusiasm. “Indeed, I am, papa dear,” and seals her promise with a whole-souled daughter’s kiss.

“Well, since my little girl’s going to obey dad in all things,” remarks Godfrey, his voice quite confident, “I’ve got to go and look at some mules I’m shipping to Matagorda for Uncle Sammy.”

“Oh, can’t I go with you?”

“Why, certainly. I had feared that you were too tired.”

“Not too tired to ride with you,” she cries, eagerly; but a moment after pouts: “I have no horse.”

“Why, there’s that mare you rode across the prairies.”

“What, Mulefoot?”

“Yes, Captain Hampton left her as a present for you,” says her father.

“Oh, he always thinks of me!” Miss Godfrey flushes with pleasure. There is a tender look in her eyes that causes a cloud to cover her father’s face. But this she doesn’t notice, having already run from him to get ready for the excursion.

The moment their horses are at the door, she comes down looking like an Indian princess, her face flushed at Hampton’s gift, and pats the glossy neck of the

mare. Turning to her father, she laughs: "I'm barbarous again. No riding habit, so I'm an Indian maiden."

"Oh, my superintendent'll have your clothes and fixin's up from Matagorda very soon," remarks Godfrey heartily, and puts his beautiful daughter in the saddle.

Then the two ride off together through Osage-orange hedges and paths bordered with wild flowers, for a look at the great plantation. As they lope over the cotton fields, her father explains to her the great extent and possibilities of the estate. They go into the cattle corrals to inspect the mules ready to be sent down to Matagorda for Uncle Sam.

"You see, there's going to be a big war, Strella," he says cheerfully. "And this is my first chance to make big money."

"Oh, then you'll have to leave me here and go on to Matagorda soon?" Her eyes grow misty at the thought of his parting from her.

"Not a bit. My superintendent, who is down there, is a man of the finest business ability, a great friend of mine, also" remarks Godfrey, adding, rather earnestly: "When he comes up here, I want you to like him, Strella."

"Oh, of course I will; any friend of my father's!" cries the girl enthusiastically, and they enjoy a very pleasant afternoon, though once a shock comes to Miss Godfrey.

Standing in one of the cotton fields, waiting for her father, who is giving some directions to an under overseer, the conversation of a near-by negro gang that gaze with darkey curiosity on their young mistress, who has given the toiling creatures some kindly words, comes to her ears.

"'Pears like de hand of Gaud ha' bin put upon us

and an angel had come down on dis 'ere plantation," orates a big Congo man.

"Can't be no angel in hell, honey," answers a woman sadly. Then the driver cracks his whip and she places her picaninny under a bush and goes with the rest of the gang to wielding a hoe through the long rows of the unending cotton fields.

Knowing the exaggerated expressions of the negro race, Miss Godfrey doesn't give any great heed to this, regarding it simply as "nigger talk." But still the whole plantation has an animalism in its great gangs of slaves working in the cotton fields under their drivers that isn't entirely obliterated by its somewhat romantic surroundings, the outlying log cabins of German settlers, who cultivate their own little farms among its islands of sycamores and oaks, being diversified by several blockhouses, each garrisoned by a few frontiersmen and hunters.

As they ride back, her father says: "Were it not that this place is a big one and able to protect itself, we would have been wiped off the face of the earth in these last few years by the raids of Mexican Rancheros or forays of the Comanche. As it is, we have to keep a pretty sharp eye for our scalps. But this war will finish up the Rancho raiders and then this country will settle up and be frontier no more."

"It shall be frontier no more to you, dear papa, from now on," remarks Estrella gaily, as she springs off her horse, full of the idea of introducing some of the elegancies of the world into her father's big adobe, backwoods household.

Consequently, Godfrey who has departed on some plantation business, chancing to return a little later and step into his bedroom, starts astounded and questions nervously: "What are you doing here, daughter?"

"Mending dad's trousers," replies Estrella. This is

quite evident; the fair priestess of domesticity, with the sleeves of her dress rolled up to her dimpled elbows, is seated, in daughter's familiarity, at work with needle and thread on his frontier wardrobe, which in truth has much need of attention.

"By gum," he mutters, "that's real kind. Even fear of a hiding won't make Milly keep the buttons on!" and he looks grateful but shame-faced as Estrella cries: "Papa dear, you are to buy a new suit of clothes the next time you go to Matagorda. Your daughter wants you to look scrumptious!"

At his supper also, he finds some confections the young lady had learned to manufacture from Mr. Martin's chef in New York. These appeal to her father's palate so greatly that he says: "Daughter, them kick-a-shaws are better than any I have ever eaten in the Tremont House, Galveston." For this is the nearest to the great world Estrella discovers Godfrey has been in the last twenty years.

Reflecting that during all this time, he had been accustomed to nothing but this rough and tumble frontier plantation, devoid of all elegancies of life, until she entered his doorway, the girl sighs to herself: "And dad endured all this to give me a fortune!"

Whereupon she introduces a little more civilization into papa's life by sitting down at her piano and singing, as he smokes his cigar, some of the tunes that have lately pleased New York.

As she finishes Godfrey says: "You've made a new world for me, my daughter. God bless you, I don't want you to ever go away from here again."

"No, father, I won't."

"That's right. You marry some Texas fellow who won't take you from me, and we'll settle down here."

"Yes, father." Her cheeks are blushing. "Some

Texas fellow who won't take her away from here!" She knows one!

"Ah, I'm glad you see the thing in my light," observes her father, pleasantly, as she seats herself by his side and takes his big hand in her little one.

"Papa," says the girl suddenly, "Captain Hampton must have spent a good deal of money for me. There is that horse that Zelma rode, and other expenses."

"Oh, as to the money, I'll take care of that," replies Godfrey rather testily. His voice has a slight command in it as he continues: "Don't you trouble Hampton. As to the mustang your gal rode, it has already been sent on to San Antonio. By the bye," he adds, "I've had your wench down at my office and registered her in our live stock. Crackey, I never guessed you had such a valuable piece of property in New York. That girl, with her white skin and fine lady airs, 'll bring twenty-five hundred dollars in the New Orleans market if she'll bring a cent."

"Oh, you'd never think of selling her!" cries Estrella. "Mother had Zelma since she was almost a child. Don't you remember, you wrote once that if she was faithful to me, Zelma should have her freedom?"

"What! Manumit that likely piece of goods? That ain't Jim Godfrey's way," cries her father, angrily. Then he stammers: "I—I wrote about her?" and looks astounded.

"Yes! But that was before you were wounded at Rock Springs," replies the girl; "wounded so you couldn't write to us for nearly a year." Though noting the hand she holds in hers bears the signs of injury, she is somewhat astonished to see that it is his left one, not his right.

"Oh—ah, yes," answers Godfrey, hastily; "but at that time I had so much upon my mind, the wench probably went out of it. I had to build up this planta-

tion and resettle it. When I came back here, there wasn't a living thing on all this place but a dog; every nigger run off, every white slaughtered."

"Except Harry Love," cries Estrella.

"What? Who's he?" These are two hasty and anxious questions.

"Why, the Ranger I told you of, who, with Captain Hampton, escorted me across the prairie; Harry Love, who was a boy here, before the massacre!"

"*Before* the massacre!" shudders Godfrey, the horror of that awful time seeming to come into his face.

"Yes. His father and mother lived over there in the cross timbers and were killed with the rest, but he escaped."

Here Estrella is startled. As she has spoken, her father's features have grown almost ashen. He has staggered to the sideboard and taken a long pull of whiskey, muttering: "Harry Love, the boy; Wild Harry escaped! Yes—I—I remember him."

"And he remembers you, too. He said you were the kindest-hearted man in all of Texas; he—but I couldn't get him to stop here last night. His father and mother had been killed just out there, and he couldn't bear to look upon the place. That's the reason he has never come near Live Oaks in these ten years." Then she half screams: "Father, the recollections are too horrible for you!"

For he is looking at her wild-eyed, and is shuddering: "Don't bring these recollections up to me, child. Pity your poor old father, and don't let this Harry Love come here; the meeting would be as cruel for him as for me. Every old face brings up your mother and your stolen sister," and, sinking into a chair, he puts his head in his hands.

Stepping to him, Estrella tries to pull his hands away to kiss his face, but cannot. Apparently he doesn't wish

her to see how the memories of the harrowing past have unnerved him; so she presses her lips to his forehead reverently murmuring: "Poor papa," and goes silently away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMING OF THE SUPERINTENDENT.

The next morning all is bright again, and that afternoon, coming in from his office, which is down on the road a couple of hundred yards away, Godfrey finds Estrella in daughter's freedom in his chamber, making his room more homelike. Gazing at his bed, he gasps: "Sheets!"

"Certainly, sheets!" laughs the young lady. "There was plenty of cotton cloth in the house, and Zelma and I can sew. Besides, I wanted sheets for myself," she adds, archly.

"Wall, I ain't seen sheets since I was at the Tremont House, Galveston," says her father. "You make me luxurious as a king, daughter," and he pats her on the head and makes her happy by calling her his good little girl.

So now come to her days happy in her father's companionship, when as princess of the plantation she rides by Jim Godfrey's side over the great estate and strives to make his homely life less crude by a daughter's love and devotion.

In addition, finding her father speaks Spanish, she takes to learning that tongue, and, as quite a number of the people about the plantation jabber that language, Estrella soon becomes fluent in it after the Mexican way, which is rather different to the true Castilian.

During this time the excitement of first meeting hav-

ing passed, the daughter begins to contemplate the father, and finds him a man of strange weakness, yet strange strength. In appearance he is somewhat younger than she had expected, very active and strong in person, and very hard in his dealings with others—though not to her. To every one else on the plantation he is autocratic, but to her he is always kindly in word and bearing, though sometimes strangely diffident and bashful for a father. In fact, his weakness seems only to be for her and his absent superintendent. Upon this man, from his remarks, Godfrey appears to lean, especially in a business way. When displeased by the backwardness of work on the plantation he so often says: "If Jasper was here things would be different;" that the daughter grows rather jealous of the absent Mr. Jasper.

As the days run on everything and everybody seems to be turned to account. Milly, the dining-room girl, is put to "chopping through cotton" in the field, and Zelma, who has but little to do as her mistress's wardrobe has not yet arrived from Matagorda, is placed in the dining-room.

Pondering on this, as Estrella does at times when she is not by her father's side or riding with him on the plantation, which is her great pleasure, Miss Godfrey cannot understand how a man who has been so liberal to her in far-away New York, grinds every ounce of muscle in the slave gangs of the cotton fields into money.

"Anyway," she thinks, "this is not altogether dad's doings. It is the arrangement of his superintendent, who is down at Matagorda, the man upon whom he seems to be so dependent and to lean so much," for she has heard: "Da young boss—and der hard drivin' Massa Jasper!" in the negro quarters. These she visits often, trying to make the existence of the toiling slaves

more bearable by kindly sympathy, at times demanding and getting from her father better food-rations for them, and once begging for them a half holiday, as it is her birthday.

This, strangely enough, her father seems to have forgotten, though when she mentions it to Godfrey, he cries effusively: "Oh, yes, by Jingo; the fifteenth of April! How could that have slipped my mind!" and gives the recreation to everyone on the plantation, and quite humbly brings her this day a handsome jewelled locket of Mexican workmanship, saying: "It was your mother's, and was concealed in the strong box with my money, which fortunately escaped the fiends when the plantation was destroyed."

"Ah, thank you, dear dad!" cries the girl, and kisses it.

Then as Godfrey notices that her fingers, urged by woman's curiosity move over its golden surface trying to open it, he laughs: "There ain't any inside to the thing. I've tried it a hundred times myself. The bauble's as solid as a nugget."

"Ah, but there is a spring in its handle," exclaims the young lady, who is more used to jewelry than her parent. "See! The mechanism is very stiff from disuse, but——" she gives a little excited cry and her agile fingers force it open. Then she eagerly asks: "Whose miniature is this?" She is looking at the face of some one painted on ivory, who seems a very dim memory to her.

Her father, who has sprung to her apparently to aid her, gives a start, gazes at the locket, then chokes a little and mutters: "Your—your mother's brother, I reckon. Didn't she ever speak of him?" A moment after he suggests: "Best take it out and some day I'll have a picture made for you of your daddy," and goes away to superintend a festival for her natal day, having

flowers and fruit brought in and sending out hunters to shoot wild turkeys and other game.

Yet two or three times during the festivities, as her father glances at the locket she has hung about her white neck, Estrella imagines he half regrets the gift, though he is more loving to her than ever and kisses her forehead, which he has crowned with wild flowers, and calls her his beautiful daughter.

In the next few days she inspects the picture in the locket during idle moments in her chamber, yet the portrait continues only a dim memory to her. She discovers in almost microscopic characters at its foot, the name of "Amalfi," presumably the artist who painted it, but this brings no suggestion with it, and finally the locket almost passes from her mind, the girl having other and more important matters on her brain, the chief of which is her father and Captain Hampton.

As to the first, a great joy wells up in her heart hungry for his affection, as at times she ponders of her father's hardness to others and his liberality to her, for she concludes his open handedness to her in New York must have been on account of his great devotion to her.

This is fortunate, as soon after an incident arises that tests her love and makes the strain upon her obedience very heavy. As the days have run on, Miss Godfrey has several times spoken to her father with regard to the Texan Captain who had escorted her across the prairies, once or twice suggesting that as San Antonio is only forty miles away, a note be sent to Hampton asking him to visit their hacienda, if he can find time from military preparation, that she may thank him again.

These suggestions Godfrey has generally put away with the remark that he is too busy for company and hasn't the time to entertain a military lounge.

At her repeated mention of Hampton's name, her

father has looked at her sharply and seemed not over pleased at her enthusiastic gratitude to her protector of the prairies; and once he has brought consternation on her by chuckling: "Just hold your horses a little, daughter. Soon there'll be a fine young fellow to ride around the plantation with you and do the polite."

She is so abashed at this, she doesn't ask her father to whom he refers; though she guesses.

Finally one day a wagon arrives from Matagorda bearing Estrella's trunks.

"You can thank Jasper for your baggage," laughs Godfrey. "Lord, how he must have shoved things to get your belongings up over these muddy roads in this time. Besides, at my suggestion, he had a feminine side-saddle sent from New Orleans. It's here also. Now you can ride woman fashion again. I reckon that will please you."

"It does!" cries the girl, who has already taken from one of her trunks her New York riding-habit, her Indian prairie costume having grown rather worn by her plantation excursions. The arrival of her baggage has made Miss Godfrey vivaciously happy, she so longs to look well in her father's eyes. She goes babbling on: "Dad, what will you think of me in this?" and crying: "Tulle over white satin, that will make you open your backwood's eyes. You never saw your daughter in decolleté Parisian ballgown in your life, did you, papa?"

Yet in the very midst of her delight, Estrella's face grows agitated and miserable. The driver of the wagon chancing to state that the news is that Sam Walker's and Sharpe Hampton's companies of Hays's Regiment of Rangers are already mustered in and are to start at once for the Rio Grande, where things look like blood betwixt Taylor and the Greasers, she leads God-

frey to one side and breaks forth suddenly and nervously, yet quite bashfully: "Dad, I must write to Captain Hampton before he goes to battle to tell him that I've not forgotten him;" then pauses astounded at her father's manner, for he says to her quite sharply: "I don't wish you to write to Captain Hampton. Your very enthusiasm may put some foolish ideas into his head now that he wears real regular Government shoulder-straps."

"Foolish ideas? What do you mean, papa?"

"Well, ideas that you may have more than gratitude for him."

At this, Estrella's face gets as red as some poppies standing on the table; she says indignantly: "Surely, my father doesn't think I have been unduly forward with any gentleman."

"Certainly not," answers Godfrey heartily.

"Then let me tell you Captain Hampton's bearing to me when I was alone in his hand on the prairie was the impersonation of respect," she draws herself up very haughtily.

"Oh, I have no doubt of that," answers her father. The trouble is, this rough-riding ranger is *too* chivalric and *too* brave. It's these very qualities that make him dangerous to romantic girls. Therefore, I judge it best that you do not write to him."

"But, father, he will think me ungrateful. I cannot permit that. He is going to—to danger. I must write."

"Understand me, Strella," replies Godfrey, his tone more severe than it has ever been to her. "You have offered me a daughter's full duty and obedience. That I exact from you. I don't wish you to write to Captain Hampton."

So her father goes away, leaving the young lady with tears in her eyes and rebellion in her heart. In the

enthusiasm of first meeting it had been easy to offer obedience. 'Tis difficult now to fulfil her promise. For Estrella Godfrey had been accustomed to do pretty much her own will with Mr. Martin of New York, and had been but slightly chided at school, and now it seems hard to her in her young womanhood, when her soul is yearning to do a thing, to be told: "Thou shalt not."

She thinks deeply, then sighs to herself: "I—I cannot let him go perhaps to death and think me an ingrate."

The evening of the third day thereafter, she astounds her father. Immediately after supper, she says: "Papa, I——" and hesitates and trembles, something she had never done before any man. "I—do not wish to have any secrets from you; I think it right to tell you that I wrote to Captain Hampton three days ago."

"What! You mean to tell me after your voluntary promises of a daughter's duty, that you have deliberately disobeyed me?" Godfrey says slowly as if he can't believe.

"Yes, if that's the way you put it, I—I did disobey you."

"How did you send the letter?" His face is flushed by a terrible anger.

"That I don't wish to tell you. It might get some of your servants into trouble."

"It *will* get some of my servants into trouble." And Zelma, chancing to have come into the dining-room on some of her duties, Godfrey says sharply to her: "Here, wench, your mistress wrote a letter. Tell me what she did with it."

"Master, I—I don't know," stammers the octoroon.

"Yer face says that ye're lying to me," cries her master, savagely, for Zelma's pretty knees are shaking under her. "Now if you want to save your white skin,

my nigger lady, tell me, or I'll take you down to my office and give you the rawhide till you do."

Here Miss Godfrey, stepping between them, says indignantly: "You shall not punish Zelma for my fault. I took the letter out myself and gave it to Pablo."

"What, that nigger-Greaser, who drives one of my ox-teams to San Antonio?" asks her father, his face growing more tranquil.

"Yes, sir."

"Humph, gave it to Pablo. Very well, I suppose it cannot be helped now," he says, as if the affair was beyond his grasp. Then he commands: "Go to your room, 'Strella. Your disobedience has wounded me—No, I shall not permit you to kiss me," for she is pleading even as she goes away: "Forgive me, father. I felt I must write—forgive me!"

Perhaps Miss Godfrey would not be so contrite did she know that ox-teams travel exceedingly slowly, therefore Pablo won't arrive at San Antonio until the morrow, and that a few minutes after she has told her father, one of his under superintendents on horseback is speeding along the San Antonio road, charged not to spare his horse.

Late the next morning, Estrella, waking up, gasps suddenly: "What load is this upon my heart?" then remembering, sighs: "For the first time I have displeased my dear father." Rising rather languidly from the bed, after a time, she thinks a ride will give her better spirits, and gives her orders to this effect.

Some few minutes after, as she comes down in her riding habit, Zelma says timidly to her: "The master, Miss Strella, wants you in the dining-room."

"Certainly," and she goes in bravely yet almost penitently to endure her father's correction, little guessing that he has now in his pocket her letter to Hampton, which he has just opened and read.

An innocent little note, it reads simply :

“Dear Captain Hampton:

Hearing that you leave for the front, I would like to say good-bye to you, and thank you once more for your care and kindness to me in the long ride over the prairies.

As your regiment or company must pass not very far from us on its way to the South, if it is possible, ride over, if only for a few minutes, and let me say adieu to one for whose safety in battle I shall ever pray.

Yours most gratefully,

ESTRELLA GODFREY.

P.S.—Do you recognize the little wild flower, one of those you gathered for me on the prairie? The rest I shall keep.”

This postscript and this wild flower make Godfrey very stern with his daughter as she comes in, and looking lovingly yet anxiously into his face pleads: “Father, am I forgiven?”

“Not until I have made you know you must never disobey me.”

“Oh, papa!” Her face flushes as she stands before him, her graceful pose in her riding-habit as drooping as poor Psyche’s when that unfortunate nymph awaited Venus’s chastisement, for Miss Godfrey has not been accustomed to childish correction.

Perchance it is the riding-habit that puts the idea in her father’s head. He says sternly: “For your offence, I am going to take away from you the use of Mulefoot.”

“What, *his* gift?”

“*His* gift” makes her father very angry. He says determinedly: “Yes, you ride no more for the present. Put your foot over that mare’s back, and I’ll have her shot.”

“O-o-oh!” gasps the lovely culprit, and she runs out onto to the porch, and fondling the graceful neck of the black mare, cries to the negro boy: “Take her away,

quick!" as if she feared her father even now might destroy the Ranger's present.

Coming in from this, she half sobs: "That was a cruel threat, father; that was a cruel threat!"

Debarred of horseback exercise, Miss Godfrey during the next few days turns to Hampton's other present. She takes to practising at a mark with the two revolvers the Ranger had given to her, and in the course of time, remembering his directions, becomes quite deadly with these weapons, and jeers herself as she makes bull's-eyes. "It wouldn't take three shots now to kill a poor mustang," or, "I don't think I'd miss that Comanche the first time I'd pulled trigger at him." Then imitating Wild Harry, she cries: "Waugh, I am becoming a frontier girl, I am!"

During these days, Pablo, returning from his trip to San Antonio, is eagerly questioned by his young mistress: To her the mestizo says: "Yas, I gabe de lettah to dat Ranger Capt'in."

"And then?" Miss Godfrey's tone is very eager.

"Den he took a glass of noyau and says: 'Dat's all right,' and stuck it in him pocket. He was drinkin' wid some udder of dose Ranger fellahs. Santos, all dat dey is talkin' now is 'bout butcherin' der Greasers down on de Rio Grande."

"He said nothing—nothing else?"

"Not a word of mouth!"

"You're sure it was Captain Hampton?"

"Sartin! *Caspita*, ev'rybody know dat *diablo* Sharpe Hampton!"

Then Miss Godfrey goes silently away. Pablo, half Mexican, half negro, but whole slave of her father, has done his work very well, as the poor wretch had good reason for doing, having promise of a silver dollar if he lies straight, and fifty lashes at the whipping-post if

he blabs about the letter having been taken from him by Godfrey's orders.

But a month passing and no acknowledgement nor visit coming from Hampton, and the news being brought by teamsters that Sam Walker's and Sharpe Hampton's companies have left San Antonio and gone down in advance of Hays's Regiment to join Taylor's army, the girl's face grows prouder, yet paler.

The Ranger's seeming neglect brings her nearer to her father once more; she sighs to herself: "I disobeyed and wounded my dear old dad by perhaps being unduly forward with this man who thinks more of killing Greasers than of being polite to me," and forgives her "dear dad" for his severity about Mulefoot, and goes to making his house very pleasant for him, embellishing it with many of the little feminine nick-nacks which have arrived with her trunks, and decking herself each evening in pretty gowns to make her father proud of her.

So time runs along until one morning towards the end of May, Estrella hears a commotion and cheering outside the gates of the big patio. Coming out she finds quite a little concourse of the hunters and trappers and German immigrants of the estate, who are standing about some wagons which have arrived from Matagorda. Their cry is that the war has begun, and that Taylor has defeated the Mexicans in two pitched battles. Chancing to hear the name of Sharpe Hampton mentioned, Miss Godfrey gets hold of a newspaper that has been brought up by one of the teamsters, and taking it to her room, sits down and reads in the Galveston Herald an account of that glorious deed of arms which probably prevented the discomfiture of Taylor's Army.

It states that the Texan Rangers under Sam Walker and Sharpe Hampton arrived by forced marches at Point Isabella, which Taylor had made his depot for provisions and supplies, though he had located his army

twenty-five miles away on the Rio Grande, having built the fortification known as Fort Brown opposite the Mexican town of Matamoras. That when the Rangers had left Point Isabella to join the American forces, they had immediately found themselves confronted by the whole Mexican army, under Arista, which had got between Taylor and his base of supplies, and was now about to crush the slender garrison of Point Isabella. Knowing that intelligence of this was vital to the American commander, six men had volunteered to make their way by night through the whole Mexican army, and that but two had got through alive, Sam Walker and Sharpe Hampton.

This information, so desperately borne, had been the salvation of General Taylor, who, leaving a heavy garrison in Fort Brown, had immediately returned to Point Isabella and reinforced his base of supplies. Then he had turned upon his foe again and fought his way once more to the Rio Grande, winning the two pitched battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. Even the account of the gallant Ringgold, killed mid his batteries during the first engagement, or the charge of May's Dragoons at Resaca de la Palma, where they had sabered the Mexican gunners, and in which she sees young Pelham's name honorably mentioned, is naught in her mind as her eyes grow misty over the last paragraph of the article, which states that both these glorious victories had been made possible by the unexampled feat of Captains Samuel H. Walker and Sharpe Selby Hampton.

Over this she gets to crying and wringing her hands and muttering: "He only thinks of battle."

Then awed and ashamed at the intensity of her own emotion, Estrella dries her eyes and comes down to her father.

This gentleman is sitting on the porch and greets her

in happy voice: "By golly, the war's commenced that'll give us a fortune!"

Here consternation seems to come upon her father in his elation, for a wild idea entering Estrella's mind places a wistful hope in her excited eyes. She says hurriedly: "Dad—answer me one question, square as you hope to see your God. Have you ever intercepted any letters?"

"What do you mean, girl?" cries Godfrey, starting up, his face for a moment on fire, then growing pallid.

"Oh, I mean, you have never intercepted any letters from—from Captain Hampton to me?"

"Certainly not," says her father promptly, his features becoming more composed. Then he breaks forth: "You—you haven't had any correspondence with this man? Answer me square as you hope to see your God, girl!"

"No, father; nothing but the one letter that I told you of, and—and—which you were perfectly right in forbidding me to send, but I am punished for it. Oh, Heaven, what a humiliation!" she shudders half hysterically. "Why I—I kind of threw myself at his head. At least, I—I—gave him a hint, I——" And her beautiful face is so piteous that Godfrey, knowing what he does, should have compunctions of conscience.

But his daughter's confession only seems to make him alarmed and angry. Still, judging that wounded pride will now make the penitent pliable to his wishes, he controls himself, and, putting his arm possessively about her, says: "I don't wish to mention this Hampton matter again. Understand me, you are to have no further communication with this man."

"Yes, my self respect should keep me from that," breaks out the girl, her lips trembling, her eyes full of tears.

"And if you have not pride in this yourself," mutters

Godfrey sternly, "by the Lord Harry, I have pride enough as our father to keep you from it. Disobey me in this, and I shall punish you severely."

"Yes, dad!" she cries almost deliriously, "Only forgive me for having disobeyed you," and she half hysterically throws herself sobbing into her father's arms.

At her submission a look of tremendous relief ripples Godfrey's stern features. Apparently filled with gratitude at her devotion, seating himself, he draws the beautiful penitent upon his knee and thanks her for her compliance with his wishes.

And she, filled with joy that the difference between her and her father is now absolutely healed, and feeling that he entirely loves her, this being the first time he has ever treated her with so much paternal familiarity, clinging to him, sobs her heart out upon his breast.

So a couple of days later, Godfrey, thinking his daughter is well in hand, makes Estrella's pallid features grow very red by saying: "You needn't mope for gentlemen's company from now on, daughter. There's more news come by wagon from Matagorda. My superintendent, the boy who is like a son to me, will be up this evening to talk to me about our big contracts for cattle to be delivered to Taylor's Army. He's a mighty smart fellow and tends to business and is more to my liking than these high-falutin', harum-scarum Ranger chaps, who haven't more than a dirty shirt and a six-shooter to their names.* Have a nice supper and your wench rigged out for company in the dining-room. Get his room fixed up smart and put sheets on his bed. Spruce up a little yourself and do your politest, daughter."

* A Texan Ranger's costume was described as a dirty shirt and a six-shooter; but it was by the same wag who stated the costume of a Georgia Colonel was a shirt collar and a pair of spurs.—*Editor*.

To this Miss Godfrey responds tenderly: "Papa, don't I always feed you well? I'll have your superintendent's room in order and see that everything is as you wish."

So this evening, arrayed in pretty white muslin, the girl comes tripping down, prepared to make herself pleasant to her father's protégé, to be struck with consternation, dismay and affright.

As she enters the supper-room, a gentleman, whose clothes indicate hasty frontier travel, but who wears conspicuously a little golden circle, rises to greet her.

"Strella," says her father, rather nervously, "let me present to you, Jasper Moncton, the superintendent of my plantations, whom I have spoken to you about so often, my trusted right-hand man and *friend*."

At these words bashful trepidation overwhelms her. This meeting has been so unexpected, so unannounced. True, the girl has heard the darkeys talk of "Massa Munktoon," and her father has spoken of "Jasper," but has never connected the two names.

With a slightly amused smile Moncton observes: "Yes, we met in Saratoga some two years ago, didn't we, Miss Godfrey?" Then his dark eyes gleam possessively as they inspect the loveliness of the maid, her light muslin dress displaying the graces of her figure, and her beauty perhaps added to by eyes that are sparkling with a kind of modest terror, for now she remembers what this man had said to her when she had rejected him two years ago.

Seeming to read her thoughts, Jasper laughs slightly: "From your face, I'm sure you recollect. You were in costume at the fancy ball at Saratoga," adding significantly: "I told you that we'd meet again."

Godfrey making no comment on the man's words, Estrella is even more impressed, being certain that her father must have known all this time of their previous

meeting. With this ominous thought in her head, the young lady has no appetite for supper, though both gentlemen chat to her quite merrily, and Moncton's glances show open admiration of her beauties, which had been enticing as a schoolgirl, but now in her exquisite young womanhood are enchanting and overpowering.

The meal being finished, at Godfrey's request, she sings, though in half-hearted voice, the songs he likes. and even, at Moncton's suggestion, makes very bad work of some Italian bravura music. But after this is over, leaving the gentlemen smoking their cigars and drinking their hot whiskey punches together, she comes up to her bedroom. Here her face is so perturbed and startled that Zelma, who is waiting for her, gasps: "What is the matter, Miss Stella? Is it because he's the chap who made love to you at Saratoga that you look so scared?"

To her maid the mistress answers nothing, but stepping out on to the veranda of her room, presses her hand to her beating heart and falters: "Why should I not fear this insidious man, whose hand I spurned in Saratoga, who told me that sooner or later I should be his; that the object of his life would be to gain me. What does this mean? When here, alone, far from the world, I find him my father's confidant and my father's —*master!*" she starts, shuddering at her own sinister idea, but still repeats it mentally: "That's what was in his eyes. MASTER! I saw it twice when he glanced towards my father at the table; then turned his gaze on me as if I had been brought here for his wooing. God help me, that's what has happened to me! I have been brought here by my father for this man to conquer and make his."

Even now it scarce seems real to her, but Moncton's voice is heard down stairs calling dominantly in

slightly intoxicated tones: "Zelma, you wench, skip quick with a new whiskey bottle, Madame China doll!"

Turning her fair eyes over the prairie looking towards the Rio Grande, Estrella whispers to the night wind: "Hampton—I fear I need you—Hampton! You saved me from Indians; save me from worse!" then sighs despairingly: "Oh, my God, even he's deserted me!" And misery and terror battle with her love.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHARPE HAMPTON'S SWEETHEART.

After an almost sleepless night, Miss Godfrey becomes satisfied that what she had divined the evening before is the grim truth. Coming down stairs next morning, with a sinking of the heart at wounded modesty and humbled pride, Estrella finds that she has been brought from far away New York to this distant Texas plantation to be convenient for the wooing of Jasper Moncton.

True, she is not told this in so many words. But at first opportunity her father says to her, when they are alone together, Moncton being busied with some plantation affairs, for he immediately devotes himself to running the business of the big estate: "Strella, there's a wonderful fellow. No sooner has he fixed up a big mule and cattle trade with the United States quartermaster and commissariat officers, who are picking up things for use in the coming war, than he's up here getting the stuff to fill the contracts. He's just the kind of a man for this country. In fact, he's the spruce young fellow that I would like to settle down with you."

"Father, please tell me exactly what you mean?" Though she asks the question, the girl guesses too well at what he hints.

"Oh, what I said to you when you first came and made this place a kind of paradise to your old father," he answers; "Jasper's the kind of man that you should marry, one who won't take you away from me."

She doesn't reply to this, but goes out into the patio and is very haughty to Moncton, when that dark-eyed, dashing fellow, whose manners have the polish of the Mississippi River boat, but hardly the delicacy of a drawing-room, comes riding up and says: "Good morning, Miss Strella. The cotton fields are looking mighty well and the plants doing finely. Like to have a jaunt and look over them with me?"

"Thank you, Mr. Moncton," she answers coolly. "Papa has forbidden me the use of my horse. It was a punishment for disobeying him."

"Ah, she's a little skittish, is she, Godfrey?" laughs Jasper in a way that makes her writhe. Then he makes her writhe a little more; he suggests: "I'll make your peace with your father," and tears come into the girl's eyes at humiliated pride as he says: "Jim, you mustn't be too hard on your pretty daughter. At my request, let up on her a little and permit her to have her mare to ride over the plantation with me."

"Why, of course, if you ask it," answers Godfrey, and turning to his daughter, he says: "You ought to thank Moncton for begging you off. Now run upstairs and get into your riding habit."

"Excuse me. Deprived of the exercise, I have rather lost my taste for it," she remarks indifferently.

"Shucks, you need it. It'll make you brisker," returns her father. Then his eyes grow entreating: "You'll do it for your old daddy?"

"Yes, if you'll go with us, papa!" she answers affectionately.

"Reckon, I must," laughs Godfrey. Some minutes after the young lady sweeps down haughty as a goddess, and stands waiting for her horse, the glove-like bodice of the riding-habit of that day tracing each rounded outline of bust and shoulders, and the folds of its cloth skirt indicating limbs graceful as a nymph's.

His eyes on fire, Moncton steps to assist the beautiful creature into the saddle. But motioning the darkey boy to lead Mulefoot beside the veranda, Estrella springs on the mare's back and makes Jasper and Godfrey scowl at her by laughing: "Dad, Captain Hampton showed me that trick!"

Then she rides off with the two men, taking care all through the excursion to keep quite close to her father's side. But she feels in better spirits for the exercise, and quite politely thanks Mr. Moncton for the side-saddle.

So the days go on, the girl acting as her father's housekeeper and seeing his home is made pleasant, but feeling that pressure is being gradually brought on her in the matter of Moncton's suit. Though perhaps it is foolishly brought, for it makes her indignant and rebellious. Before, when she had disobeyed her father, she has felt sad about it. Now she doesn't care. She would write other letters to the Ranger, but he is far from her, and her pride has been too severely wounded at receiving no answer nor visit from this man.

In addition she is now quite certain that there is some secret compact between Godfrey and Moncton, by which the superintendent holds her father at his mercy. On the long, hot nights the two have got to drinking together, and whiskey having made their tongues careless, once she has heard the employé

threaten: "Make your gal quit being offish with me. You know you've got to do it, Jim."

And now, being driven desperate, for she is not always able to decline Jasper's attentions, which are proffered at every convenient opportunity, and which under her father's eye she sometimes cannot entirely refuse, one day she speaks to Godfrey confidentially, saying: "Dear dad, if Moncton has any hold upon you——"

"Any hold upon me!" half screams her father. "What do you mean, girl? Answer, what do you mean?"

"Only this," she says, bravely, though the appearance of Godfrey is such that it frightens her: "Tell me about it, and we will together face this man. Send him away. We were happy before he came. For your continued pressure upon me to accept his hand is making me undutiful even to you, dear dad."

Recovering his composure at his daughter's speech, Jim Godfrey answers so sorrowfully that he gains his child's sympathy. "He does have a hold upon me! I ~~should~~ think you could see that and not be so saucy with the handsome young fellow, who is sweet on you as a bee is on honey. You know he's cottoned to you ever since he saw you at Saratoga. He told me that when he came back from the North."

"So it is true, what I guessed, that I have been brought here to this plantation to be wooed by this man whether I willed or not," mutters Estrella bitterly; then asks reproachfully: "How could you?"

"Because I could not help it!" says her father, significantly.

"Impossible!" cries the girl. "How dare Moncton dictate to you or me."

"In this way," answers Godfrey, impressively. "After the plantation was destroyed, I was powerful short

of ready money. Even with the gold I had recovered it has been a great work to build up this place. I had to pay the expenses of German immigrants so as to have settlers enough to make my title to my land grant good. In addition, these big gangs of niggers cost a pile of money. I had to borrow it, and Moncton came forward with the ready cash. Until lately, when this war has given me a little chance to crawl out of my hole, I haven't been able to get hold of any great amount of money. So things have gone on, until with interest and notes and mortgages to Moncton, he could close up the whole thing and put me and you out on the prairie with no more money than when the Rangers picked me up crazy after the fight at Rock Springs. But Jasper's a noble fellow and 'll see me through all right."

So far, Godfrey has made his plea quite skilfully, for his daughter has uttered a sigh of sympathy when he has spoken of being as penniless as when he returned to find his people massacred and his plantation destroyed. But now her parent makes a mistake: "It wouldn't suit you, I can see," he goes on, "with your fine lady airs and handsome dresses, to be put out barefooted into the world. If you get high spirited with Moncton, I'm afraid he'll cut up rough about it, for he thinks you the finest girl in the world. Remember, every time you turn up your nose at him or say a saucy word to him, you're putting danger on your poor old dad as well as yourself." Noting that direct methods make his child rebellious, Godfrey is playing the aged parent act.

Her answer proves he is doing his role quite well. "I don't think of myself, father," says the girl, generously, "though I *will* think of you. Give me time to consider this subject, and if the task is not too hard, perhaps——"

"You'll do the right thing by Jasper," cries the old

man, enthusiastically. "You'll marry him; you'll give me grandchildren to play about my knee—"

But the future grandfather has painted domestic life too vividly. His daughter emits a short, horrified scream and runs away, though her face is not blushing; it is pale with repulsion.

To her father, some little time afterwards, she says: "It is impossible! Ask me to work for you; ask me to slave for you; but marry that man, I cannot."

But it is very hard for a girl practically alone with these two men on this secluded plantation, to always resist a father whom she loves and always to repel the attention of a dashing, persevering fellow, who will assist her into the saddle and ride at her side, for under paternal eyes Estrella cannot always decline Moncton's escort.

About this time horror comes to her; the maiden, shrinking from Jasper's wooing, begins to fear that punishments are ordered to the negroes so that she will beg them off from her suitor. For now she finds that to get mercy for the slaves, as has been her wont, she has to plead with Moncton, not her father. But her humanity is greater than her pride, and she humbles herself to do this, though on one of these occasions Jasper says to her: "Am I always to—to do your bidding for nothing? Don't you, my dear girl, remember Saratoga? Why do you always greet with cold looks the fellow who you know is bound to have you?"

His audacious arm would go round her enticing waist, but she mutters faintly: "Have pity on my father," yet shudders from him, hanging her fair head abashed beneath his too ardent gaze.

And perhaps this young lady, who has grown drooping and pathetic during these two summer months of constant pressure and persuasion, might succumb to her father's entreaties, which become each day more urgent, did not about this time arise in her mind first

a mighty joy, then a tremendous, awe-inspiring suspicion.

Knowing that Hampton has left San Antonio with his company full two months before this, Godfrey one day proposes that Estrella take a trip to that town with Moncton and himself, as he has to see Hays, the Colonel of the Texan Rangers, whose young face is growing old with his efforts to get his full regiment equipped and down to Taylor at Matamoras. But the State of Texas is very slow and very poor, and the Texan Colonel, having some difficulty in mounting his command, is now trying to induce Godfrey to take his guarantee and that of the State and furnish him the horses.

So the girl, anxious to get away from a monotony that has overburdened her spirits, makes with her father and her suitor a very long afternoon ride, and arrives in San Antonio de Bexar, coming up the banks of its beautiful tree-shaded river into the old town that a few years before had been entirely Mexican, but now has a few Gringos in its inhabitants and a lot of Texan Rangers about its unpaved streets.

The evening is well advanced when she arrives, and Estrella, arising rather late the next morning, finds that her father and Moncton have left the old Mexican inn and have gone off to their business with the Ranger officers. After a cup of chocolate and a *bunelo*, Spanish fashion, she wanders about the dreamy old pueblo, gazing at the Alamo as a sacred place, and thinking of the martyrdom, ten years before, of Travis, Bonham, Bowie and Crockett, and those other Texan immortals who died that their State might live.

Finally, strolling from the ruins of the old church fortress, whose battered walls are the altar of Texan liberty, she returns to the old tavern in which the party have made their headquarters. Here her father and

Moncton come in, the latter saying gloomily: "No trade. Hays has nothing better than Texas scrip to offer us."

"Yes, as soon as we have dinner, we'll get into the saddle again for Live Oaks," remarks Godfrey, who has just kissed his daughter's lips, proffered for morning's greeting.

They are about to sit down to a mid-day meal when a faint cheering comes very distantly up the street. "Jingo, wonder if there's news of another victory from Taylor?" remarks her father.

"Don't think that's possible," says Moncton; "Taylor won't be able to move for a couple of months at the rate he's getting ready."

"Yes, and you're keeping him from it," cries Estrella; "such men as you, father. When you say that American victory means the settlement of all these lands and enormous wealth to you, why don't you give up a little for the present and let Hays have horses for his regiment, who defend us from Indians and Mexicans?"

"Why, you're quite a stump speaker," laughs Moncton, and her father smilingly pats his daughter's cheek and says: "Business first, my child; then sentiment."

About this time a Ranger comes riding up, and checking his pony in front of the hotel, calls: "Jack Hays wants to see you again, gentlemen. He's got something from Taylor's quartermaster, gentlemen, that will fix you, he says."

"Golly, a contract from Uncle Sammy!" cries Moncton, and the two men go out together and hurry down the street, leaving Miss Godfrey alone to get a Mexican dinner.

So smiling rather sadly at herself, the young lady rolls in her pretty fingers *tortillas* and dips up with them her stew of *chili-colorado* and *tasajo*.

Then, interested in the life in the pueblo, she wanders off by herself into the picturesque Spanish streets, and is quite contentedly inspecting some Mexican boys with donkeys and women who are washing clothes on the banks of San Pedro Creek, when to her delight and astonishment she chances to raise her bright eyes and place them upon Wild Harry.

To her excited: "Mr. Love, don't you remember Estrella Godfrey?" he answers rather surlily: "Sure I remember ye, miss. But it seemed to me as if ye didn't remember *us*."

"Remember you. Why not? Did you not hear what I said to you when you left me: 'To come to the hacienda if you ever wanted a home or a friend.'" Then she breaks out reproachfully: "And you didn't go to the front with Hampton's company?"

The answer she gets horrifies her.

"No, I'm in Gillespie's," answers Harry gloomily. "I didn't care to go with a man what's got death in his eye. I want one chance for my life and I don't think Sharpe Hampton cares to have any chance. Ye see thar are some purty nice gals that gets men's hearts, and, well—well, ye're the only woman that ever didn't take a shine to Sharpe Hampton."

"I don't understand what you mean to insinuate," returns the reproached one, haughtily. "Even if you are crazy, you've no right to speak to me in that manner or on such a subject." Miss Godfrey moves away, but, womanlike, she will have the last word. She turns and adds: "Besides, you're unjust."

"Unjust? No, I ain't unjust and I ain't crazy. I'm only cute, I am."

But Estrella is so eager in her self-exculpation that she goes on: "I did write to Captain Hampton."

"Wall, then he never got it."

"Never got it! What makes you think that?" asks

Miss Godfrey, her eyes, that had been distressed, now beaming as the sun on Mr. Love.

"Wall, when I bid Sharpe good-bye, he said: 'Harry, ye'll find me t'other side of Jordan.' And," asserts the Texan, inspecting the superb yet ethereal creature who stands blushing before him, "no man that ye'd treated just right and was dead honey on ye from his spurs to his scalp-lock, would want to go t'other side of Jordan unless he toted ye with him!"

"Never got it! Never got my letter! And Pablo swore he delivered it."

"What! *Pablo*, a Greaser, I reckon? Trust a Greaser? Waugh! Somebody's been ambushin' ye, Miss Godfrey."

"Perhaps," answers Estrella, so sadly that Mr. Love suggests encouragingly: "Keep up yer spunk! Seein' ye ain't to blame, I'll tell the Cap! Perhaps that will save his life."

"Oh, will you?" cries the young lady, for this matter is too close to her to let false modesty thwart it. "Please tell Captain Hampton that I *did* write to him and that I am grateful for all that he has done for me. Please don't fail to tell him that."

Here Love gives her an awful shock. He chuckles: "Very well, I'll tell on ye right off."

"Right off? What do you mean?"

"I mean Cap Hampton's just come up from Matamoros, ridin' day an' night, with an order from Uncle Sam's Quartermaster-General that will git the horses for our rigiment from any bronco dealer on earth. Ye just take yer stand by the river bank down yonder in them pecans, Miss. I'll bring him to yer," and Harry strides away.

During this last oration, the maiden has been too surprised and confused to open her lips. She now runs

after him, crying: "No, no! For Heaven's sake, what will he think of me!"

"That ye're about right, I reckon," laughs the Ranger. Gazing at her fairylike loveliness, he chuckles: "I'll tell the Cap to load fer butterfly!" and his long legs soon carry him out of hearing from Miss Godfrey, the clinging skirt of whose riding-habit prevents very rapid movement.

For a moment she stands, her eyes frightened, her features pale and twitching in bashful tremor; then her face grows red as some prairie roses at her feet; she says determinedly: "I'll do it!" and walks tremblingly down a lawn-like slope to sit by the side of the blue waters of the San Antonio flowing in pretty ripples between banks shaded picturesquely by the varying foliage of grand oaks, graceful ash trees and a grove of pecans whose leaves afford the young lady a grateful shade this warm July day.

But after a little, the strain of waiting overcomes her; she starts as if to fly from the passions raging within her distracted soul, and mutters jeeringly: "If he got my letter and didn't heed it, then my message by word of mouth will hardly bring him to me."

A few days ago she no more could have waited for Hampton by appointment than have given herself to him unasked; but the helpless, despairing misery of the last month, during which have been forced on her the attentions of a man she loathes, from whose suit there is no protection by her father, when in fact she knows Godfrey will ultimately exercise direct authority to compel her to become this man's bride, lends the half frantic girl a kind of desperate boldness. To herself she cries: "I have only had one love in this world, and—and Harry said that he wanted death because of my ingratitude. Nonsense, 'twas my love he wanted.

Hampton's beating heart against my own told me that as I rode in his arms fleeing from the Comanches. It was the foolish, headstrong, impassioned words of that wild young dragoon that kept his lips silent!" then sneers at herself: "That's as immodest and arrogant conceit as woman ever had! No, no, I must not meet him! What will my father think of my humiliating myself again to Hampton against his absolute commands?"

This she answers by: "Pish, it is not dad's correction I fear; 'tis that my pride may be once more wounded!" and muttering hoarsely: "That shall not be!" rises to hurry from this place. But in the very act she pauses and through her lips her heart speaks; she half screams, half falters: "Sharpe!"

And it is as if their separation had never been; the Ranger Captain is looking at her as he did on the prairie. For Hampton, his dress disordered by the awful travail of sixty continuous hours in the saddle, is standing before the beautiful object of his love.

At her cry, the great hope that thrills him makes this warrior of the plains tireless, his eyes grow as brightly possessive as a panther's, though hers are timid and shrinking as a doe's. It is the first time she has called him by his Christian name; her accents carry with them, love, passion, greeting!

That during twelve weeks he has hungered for, dreamed of and despaired of this maiden, who looks beautiful as one of Diana's nymphs eluding Actæon, as with her riding skirt gathered up in one hand, she is trying with faltering feet to flee from him, makes him do the best thing for any lover—if he is loved.

The training of a trapper is to catch his game. Sharpe Hampton catches his! With one athletic stride, he has the flying beauty encircled by an arm of steel, and is half whispering, half moaning to her: "Why for

three months did you take the sun out of my heavens, sweetheart?" and she in a semi-crazy way is sobbing and crying, and her fair head has fallen upon his shoulder. The next second their hearts are beating against each other as wildly as they did when he had borne her in his arms over the prairie from the Indians. But in addition, their lips have met; not in one kiss, but in a dozen—not short ones, either, but whole-souled and passionate with youthful love. And panting on his breast, she who ten minutes since had thought herself the most miserable girl in the world, now thinks herself the happiest on earth—for she knows that she is his.

Then modesty getting the best of love, she falters: "Oh, Heavens, what must you think of me!" Next questions in pathetic reproach: "Sharpe, how could you ever go to battle and to death without even bidding me good-bye? Was it the wild words of that crazy Pelham, the dragoon, that I heard from over the balcony at Corpus Christi, when he told you to take good care of his treasure, that kept your lips silent when you—you must have known—that I loved you? My heart beating against yours in the wilderness as wildly as it does now must have told you that." This last is said with averted head; the Ranger's eyes are too ardent for her to meet his glance.

"I thought Pelham had a right to you," answers Hampton, in frontier simplicity. "Now I know he hadn't. You wouldn't give yourself to me if he had. You're not the kind of girl to play with two men at one time."

"No, indeed, I'm not!" says Estrella, very truthfully, and receives for her candor a very pleasant reward.

After a little both grow slightly more rational, and sit down side by side. But soon the lady commences to

ask questions: "Why did you not answer my note that I wrote asking you before you left for danger and battle to come and bid me good-bye?"

"The only missive that I have received from your hacienda," remarks Hampton shortly, his eyes resting very tenderly on the loveliness before him, for the girl in her excitement and passion looks in the flesh even more enchanting than perchance she had seemed to his imagination, and he has thought of her very often, "was one from your father, in which he enclosed a draft on Galveston for your expenses and what he deemed the price of Mulefoot, that I had left as a present for you."

"Why, it was almost an insult!" cries his sweetheart, indignantly.

"Yes, I hardly thought it over polite. At all events, I concluded it indicated your father wished to be rid of an unpleasant obligation."

"And dad did that?" says Estrella bitterly; then queries eagerly: "And you never received my letter begging you to come and say good-bye to me? The one with the little flower in it, one of the posies you plucked for me on the prairie. I kept the rest, Sharpe," murmurs the girl, archly but diffidently, "though papa commanded me never to think of you again, and my pride told me that, too. And if I hadn't been nearly crazy with misery, I don't think you would have got me, Sharpe."

"Crazy with misery. You've turned to me because you're unhappy?"

"Oh, no; not that. But I don't think I would have ever seen you again if I hadn't been so desperate that I—I wasn't as modest as I generally am."

Whereupon Miss Godfrey tells of Moncton's pursuit of her, stating that her father is pressing her to marry his superintendent because they'll both be pau-

pers if she doesn't. "But I—I couldn't give myself to any man but you, and—and that's embarrassing enough," falters the young lady; for the first rapture of surrender being over, Hampton's eyes are so ardent that she hangs her head, though perhaps she loves him more because, having modestly won her, he now fondles her as backwoods boy does frontier sweetheart. Though in truth the Captain is very tender with this graceful creature, who seems to him like a fairy descended to earth to bless him with her ethereal beauty and radiant love.

She now also receives the consolation of being supported by a man who may be very diffident in his wooing, but is very strong in his possession. She is sure that having won her, her Ranger sweetheart will never permit her to be another's.

Hampton says shortly: "Sweetheart, don't let that bother you a little bit. You just tell your dad that you're Sharpe Hampton's promised wife, and you tell that also to that Moncton when he comes talking honey to you, and he'll know it means that he lets you alone, or——"

"Or," she breaks in sadly, "or you risk your life in personal combat."

"I'm accustomed to that."

"Yes, you risked it against a whole Mexican army," she murmurs; then sighs: "Did you do that because you didn't think you'd get me?"

The answer that she receives is not as complimentary as perchance she expected. "Not exactly," answers Hampton promptly. "I did it because it was my duty. Of course, I felt blue as thunder, but I don't commit suicide for misery. You wouldn't want happiness to make a coward of me, either, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," sighs his sweetheart. "Of course, I know you're compelled to go to the front."

"Oh, not immediately. Taylor won't be able to move for six weeks. I only brought the order up to get the horses for Hays's command two hours ago. The boys won't be ready to go down for two or three weeks. Worth's Division won't be concentrated at Camargo for a month more. A third of the volunteers and regulars haven't left New Orleans yet for the big campaign in Northern Mexico, and by the White Buffalo, in the two or three weeks' leave I'll get"—Hampton emphasizes his words with a possessive pressure on the delicate waist that vibrates in his grasp—"we're going to have—if you say so, girl—the very nicest honeymoon——"

"Oh, Heaven!" gasps the young lady.

"And I'm going to have the very sweetest bride man ever had."

"You mean you would marry me immediately?" falters Miss Godfrey, in almost terrified amazement. "Why, I've—I've only seen your face a few months."

"Oh, yes; I've only seen your face that time, too. Reckon I might as well be scared as you. But I'm gritty in the marriage matter, I am," says Sharpe, enthusiastically. "Bill Baldwin only knew his girl two days, and Luther Loring married his wife the morning after he rescued her from the Apaches. You've got pluck enough for a Ranger's wife, Stella!" It's the first time he has used her Christian name, but it seems to come easily to his tongue. "And after we've had two or three weeks of bliss, you put the kiss of a soldier's wife on my lips and you say: 'Sharpe, you go down and do your duty for your country.'"

"But my father!" murmurs the demanded one, tremblingly.

"Oh, don't bother yourself about him. I'll take care of that. I've seen dads pick out the wrong men for their daughters' husbands and—guess again," laughs Hampton, as if the affair was settled. "You explain

the matter to the old man and I'll be down to see you to-morrow evening. I cannot get away before. But perhaps you'd better tell your father to let you stay up in San Antonio till the wedding."

"No—no, I must break it to him quietly," pleads the girl. "Sharpe, give me a few hours to break it to dad, though I suppose he'll see it in my face. Besides, it won't be so hard after all, for papa loves me.

"Very well," remarks Hampton, "you tell dad in your own way. I'm right glad you say that you're no great shakes for money. Tell you the truth, that big hacienda always seemed to stand between us, but I've a little plantation of my own up in Shelby County, and if you're the girl I think you are, you'd share my blanket if I hadn't but one to my name!"

"Yes, I would!" answers Strella, stoutly. Though her face is very red, as for this nice answer she receives a kiss that makes her quiver from head to heel.

"Remember this, I can't give you more than a couple of days to get ready for the wedding," whispers the Ranger, very longingly.

"No, Sharpe, that'll be enough, because I—I love you," murmurs Estrella. She puts her arms tenderly about him, and makes him happy with a kiss that carries her soul to her lips.

But here Hampton mutters: "I'm afraid I've been a little selfish in my love. I've no right to ask you to hitch your fate, sweetheart, with a man's who may be dead in a month. Though I'd like to call you wife before I die, dear one—just wouldn't seem quite right if I didn't."

"And you shall!" cries his fiancée, impetuously. "You said two days—in two days. I call you husband and you call me——"

"Wife!" whispers Hampton, taking off his sombrero to her in his simple frontier way, for the word

"wife" produces reverence as well as ardor in true manhood.

So, with her hand in her affianced's, Estrella strolls out of the pecan grove to grow red under the eyes of Mr. Love, who, apparently awaiting them, sits whittling a willow branch.

The frontiersman gazes at the coming bride, emits a prolonged whistle and ejaculates, sententiously: "Dropped!"

"Yes, I'm Sharpe Hampton's gal!" says the new fiancée, bashfully but proudly, in frontier fashion, though in truth she wonders even now whether she is rational or not, her "dropping" having been so sudden.

CHAPTER XV.

A MIGHTY SUSPICION.

Here Hampton says: "Love, you needn't open your mouth about this to the boys!"

"No, sirree!" answers Harry.

But Miss Godfrey, taking a sweetheart's privilege, suddenly cries: "Sharpe, you haven't had any sleep for sixty hours. Now, be a good boy and go off and get some rest. Mr. Love will take me back to the hotel!"

"Right ye are," rejoins the frontiersman, and turns his back abruptly upon the couple. This, as they are still secluded by shrubbery from the street, gives Hampton an opportunity for a farewell kiss. The girl, as she returns it, makes him very happy by prattling in an affianced's voice: "Now please do what I say. Get a little sleep. You're not all iron, you—you're flesh and blood."

"Oh, very much flesh and blood when I get you in my arms," answers Hampton, with such a look in his eyes that the coming bride retreats from him laughingly, yet blushing. To her he says, significantly: "Don't forget, Sis, I'll be down to see dad to-morrow evening at Live Oaks and make arrangements for the wedding."

"Yes, Sharpe, to-morrow evening," whispers Miss Godfrey, and watches with her heart in her eyes the Captain stride back towards the Rangers' quarters just across the great plaza, then very happily and excitedly trips off towards the inn, escorted by Mr. Love.

"Thar's purty considerable ginger left in Sharpe yit, allowin' he's travell'd horseback three days and nights runnin', eh?" suggests Wild Harry.

"Y-e-s." murmurs the girl.

"Ye look as if he'd been 'bout as spry wid ye as three or four city fellers!" laughs her companion, "yer hair's mussed awful."

"Yes, but please don't talk about it, Mr. Love," falters Estrella, hanging her head, though there is a mighty elation in her heart. She thinks: "This morning, shuddering from the proffered hand of Jasper Moncton; this afternoon, happy in the arms of Sharpe Hampton." Suddenly her bliss is tempered with the direful consideration: "How shall I tell my father when he says what I am about to do will bring beggary upon him?" and the agitated girl would go into a miserable brown study were Mr. Love, the escort, to give her time for contemplation.

As he walks by her side he is chuckling: "Ye war jis: like the coon up the tree and Martin Scott,* weren't

* Col. Martin Scott of the Fifth Infantry, who was killed when gallantly leading the American assault on the Casa Mata at the battle of Molino del Rey, was so celebrated for his deadly marksmanship with the rifle in the South and West that

ye, Miss 'Strella? When he come along you say: 'Oh, dat you, Sharpe Hampton? You're such a dead shot, I'll come right down!'"

This, emphasized by the frontiersman's coonlike actions, would make Miss Godfrey laugh in a half bashful, half hysterical way, did not the harum-scarum fellow suddenly say: "And he's most kissed yer mammy's locket off ye." For in her interview with her affianced Miss Godfrey has pulled this trinket from out her riding habit to show it to the Ranger Captain as proof of her father's great love and tenderness for her, and now it is carelessly dangling about her white neck by its golden chain.

"Ah, you recognize the trinket," murmurs Miss Godfrey, much more interested in other things than in her jewelry.

"Sartin! Every one at Live Oaks knowed that 'ere locket. Yer dad ordered it made down in Matamoros. It's Greaser workmanship. Look here! Reckon I do know the locket!" Wild Harry takes the bauble as it dangles from her, and shows he is well acquainted with the trinket, for he presses the hidden spring and astounds Estrella by saying: "How do you like yer dad's face!"

"My dad's face!" half screams the girl.

"Shucks, it's empty," mutters the erratic fellow. "Ye yanked dad out to put Sharpe's picture in, eh?"

"But there was a picture there two days ago," whispers Estrella. "You said my father's face!" Then she suddenly asks, a strange quiver in her voice: "What was the portrait like? You're certain my father had one painted?"

the story of a raccoon, perched on a very high tree, seeing Scott pass along with a walking stick in hand, and crying out: "Dat you, Martin Scott? You needn't shoot, I'll come down!" was a popular anecdote at that time.—*Editor.*

"Oh, sure as ye're trembling now. On ivory; or chiney. Yer dad said it was to send to yer mammy. Bless yer heart, he was so proud of his picture, he showed it to everybody about the plantation. Didn't he show it to ye? It had an Italian name written under it."

"Amalfi!" screams the girl.

"Why, yes; ye guessed it fust time!" answers Love, and, playing with the locket, does not note that his listener's face has grown pallid and her eyes strained by some marvellous and astounding thought. "That was the name of the travelling Italian that painted it," continues Harry, closing the trinket. "The pronouncing of Amalfi always kinder stuck in my windpipe. He was a no-count kind of a dago, who'd wandered up here jist afore yer dad went on that 'ere expedition lookin' fer the Gran Quevira* that time when the Comanches came down and wiped out the plantation* and killed my mammy. You remember, girl, my mammy!" Love's eyes grow so dim he doesn't notice the monstrous effect his words have had upon his companion.

For Miss Godfrey is thinking very hard, and now has a strange suspicion in her voice, as she is saying with lips that have grown ashen: "You can see my father to-day without wounding your feelings by visiting the place of your mother's death. He is here in town."

"What, Jim Godfrey here! It's strange I haven't put my eyes on him!" cries Harry, heartily.

"Yes, he's now at the old Mexican posada, talking to your Colonel. Supposing you go down and shake

* The myth of the lost mines of la Gran Quevira was at one time in Texas as much believed in as those of the Lost Cabin, the Silver Bullet and the Death Valley mines are at present among many of the prospectors of the West.—*Editor.*

his hand, and come along with him. I'd—I'd like to see you very much together."

"Wall, I'd like to see myself together with Jim Godfrey very much, Miss Strella," remarks the frontiersman. "Though I shan't say nothin' to dad. Like to tell dad yerself. Little bashful, eh? For Estrella is quivering and waving like a lily swaying in the breeze.

"Yes, and even if you don't see my dad," falters the girl, a curious, weird intensity in her voice, "don't say anything about this locket or—or anything else to Hampton. At least, not until you've seen me."

"Why, sartin', but I don't see how that makes any difference." Here the frontiersman interrupts his own speech by suddenly crying out: "Great Golly! Love has made ye lunny!"

For Estrella is reeling and gasping half hysterically: "You said my father's face was in that locket. My father's face! Oh, it seemed to come to me out of the past! Good heavens, I begin to remember, I—I—"

"Holy poker, this hot sun or Sharpe Hampton has rubbed yer poor brain out!" mutters Wild Harry, and seizes the delicate girl to keep her from falling. Then he takes her in his strong arms and carries her back to the inn, where, finding her father has not returned, he says to the Mexican hostess: "Here's a gal who's got sunstruck or high strikes or something. Ye revive her. I'm too bashful to unlace her stays and do the proper thing by her!"

As soon as "the proper thing" is done for Miss Godfrey in the retirement of a little chamber of the posada by a couple of Mexican girls, Mr. Love goes away to find her daddy.

Quite shortly Estrella revives and goes to pacing her room, muttering: "That picture taken from the locket, by whom? and why taken? The sight of it was a surprise to my father, my—Is he my father?"

Oh, God, what is in my head? Is he my father? But Love will see him. Ten years can't have changed him too much to be recognized. Still, it is very curious, very suspicious." And she recalls the mysterious change in her father's letters after the Rock Springs fight, and begins to remember what Hampton had told her on the steamer about the man they had rescued from the desert combat, and his going back to the Live Oaks hacienda, and, after discovering every ~~living~~ thing upon it dead, making up his mind to rebuild and restock it, though before that he had only intended to obtain the gold buried in its ruins and then go away from it. Frantically she strikes her forehead and asks: "Could it be possible?" and answers herself: "Yes, it might! Every white man on the plantation butchered. Nearly every settler that could possibly have seen his face gone to death at the massacres of the Alamo and Goliad. Every negro on his plantation run off; the whole country deserted and made a desert by raids of the savages and forays of the Mexican rancheros. It might be!"

Then, sweetheart's confidence coming into her, she murmurs: "I must see Sharpe. I must get Wild Harry to bring him to me," next pauses and mutters: "My Heaven, no; *not till I am sure*. If Sharpe doubted my father also, and dad turned out to be dad, then he would never forgive my husband. It will be hard enough now when Hampton's marriage to me ruins dad," next bursts out hysterically: "Dad! Oh, I pray Heaven he is dad!" and through her kindly mind comes a frantic hope that her suspicion may come to naught. She has given this man a daughter's tender love so long she finds it very hard to think it only dross. She has placed him on high in her confidence and affections, 'tis difficult to throw him into the dust. She

murmurs to herself: "Oh, God, I loved him so dearly, and yet I must know!"

Pacing the room, she waits for Harry to return, and, finally, such is her anxiety, goes down into the street and watches for him.

But the Texan Ranger never comes along, and, tired with wracking anxiety and tremendous suspense, the girl goes back into the inn and seats herself on the low balcony of the posada and still watches.

Shortly after Godfrey and Moncton come hastily walking up the street, full of the excitement of a big horse trade. As they pause at the entrance of the inn she, sitting on the low balcony that is scarce five feet over their heads, hears Moncton say to Godfrey: "That order of Uncle Sam's Quartermaster's all right."

"Sure," replies the other; then asks: "Do you know who brought it?" and whispers some name she cannot distinguish.

This is greeted by a muttered execration from Jasper, who adds: "Curse him! Fortunately, he's been in the saddle three days and wasn't very lively to get about town to see her."

"That's so much the more reason we'd better get her out of town quick," answers Godfrey, and orders their horses to be hastily brought up.

At their summons the girl descends to them. Fortunately, it is now growing dark, and they don't look very closely at her, but when her father approaches her to place her in the saddle she draws slightly back and says: "Mr. Moncton, please." This so delights both Godfrey and her suitor that both gentlemen seem very much pleased with their fair charge as they lope along.

But between them rides a girl whose eyes sparkle as the stars of the night above her, and whose soul is wracked with "Is this man my father? If he is, for

my suspicion I'll sue his pardon on my bended knees. If he is not, let him beware, for he has accepted from my lips the kisses of a daughter." In her agitation she has almost forgotten that she is coming bride to the Ranger Captain.

Elated with Estrella's complaisance to Moncton, and likewise a successful horse trade, and talking mostly of that, her two escorts during this dark ride do not note the distracting passions on Miss Godfrey's face.

This is very fortunate. It gives the young lady not only time to control the display of her emotions, but to determine upon her methods of action. But the conversation as they ride along brings Miss Godfrey's thoughts once more upon her love, yet also makes her reticent in regard to it.

The gentlemen are quite merry over the price they have got for their horses from the Ranger Colonel, Godfrey saying: "Jingo, didn't Hays hold out on the figure for those broncos; but he had to have the nags to get his command down to Taylor in time," adding, grimly: "Reckon many of his boys will leave their bones the other side of the Rio Grande."

Estrella is quite sure from the tone of his voice that he hopes Hampton will be one of those doomed to death.

But Jasper here startles both his companions by remarking: "Jim, did you see that long-legged Ranger squinting at you for the last ten minutes you were fixing up the horse trade with Hays?"

"Not Sharpe Hampton?" asks Godfrey, uneasily. And Estrella, exhibiting no surprise at his words, he glances at her, but she is too interested in Jasper's communication to notice this.

Moncton answers easily: "No, it wasn't the Captain; I know him by sight. It was a slim, crazy-eyed fellow in buckskin, who looked at you as if you had

made him a little more lunny than usual. I was going to tell you about him, but didn't like to interrupt when you were getting such a long price for the horses from the Texan Colonel. Some of the boys in the saloon called him Wild Harry!"

"Wild Harry! Why, I—I thought he was with Hampton's company down at Matamoras!" stammers Godfrey. His voice is husky. Despite the darkness, Estrella can see him sway in his seat. She is not surprised that under the plea of cinching up his saddle Godfrey lets her ride ahead while he and Jasper go into quite a long, muttered conversation.

In it apparently Moncton learns something that impresses him also; when the two men overtake the young lady neither seems in such high spirits as before.

This gives her suspicions greater strength. Miss Godfrey now makes up her mind not to mention her promise to Hampton. "Why should I sue—blushing, trembling and embarrassed—for a father's blessing until I am sure he has a father's authority and love?" she thinks cogently, and is quite relieved at postponing an ordeal that even in her sweetheart's arms had made her cold with apprehension.

So, taking it rather leisurely, after a long ride through the darkness they reach the hacienda of Live Oaks some time after midnight, to be ushered in by Zelma, who has supper on the table awaiting them.

As Estrella avoiding Moncton's attentions, hastily slips off her horse, she is no more the girl who yesterday had left this place drooping under a father's entreaties that it almost breaks her heart to deny, nor a bashful maiden, trembling at the wooing of a man she loathes; but a woman determined to give herself to the man she loves, and to make sure the man assuming a father's station to her has a parent's authority over her before she asks his blessing.

Even as she dismounts Estrella shows how carefully she has considered her position. If Godfrey has purloined the picture, her not mentioning her loss will make him suspicious. As soon as she is in the doorway of the house, and standing in the light, she says, her fragile hand playing nervously with her locket: "Papa"—the word comes very hard to her tongue now—"I hope you won't be very angry at me, but in San Antonio I discovered I had lost the picture from my locket. It must have fallen out while I was galloping so recklessly into the town." The languor and great exhaustion of the long ride make her eyes tranquil, but they are bright enough to notice that at mention of the locket a sudden anxiety has flown into both men's faces, indicating that they have discussed the trinket. Her careless words apparently bring relief to them, for Moncton asks, nonchalantly: "What locket?" and Godfrey cries heartily: "Shucks, don't bother about it. I'll give you my picture to put in that fol-de-rol on your wedding day, daughter. Do the polite to her, Jasper, and tote your sweetheart in to supper!"

Estrella, embarrassed at the words, has tact enough to refuse her suitor's escort to the table on the ground of extreme fatigue, and to permit, though she winces under it, a paternal salute on her white forehead from Godfrey. So, leaving the two gentlemen to smoke their cigars and drink their whiskey together, the girl goes wearily but hastily up to her chamber. Here, fortunately, the great joy of approaching nuptials almost obliterates the miserable uncertainty of her position. But after a little, exhausted by her long journey, nature claims its meed, rest comes to her, and, despite excitement, she has the blessing of a dreamless sleep.

Awakening early in the forenoon, a sweetheart's rap-

ture thrills her, and she whispers to herself, longingly: "This evening Sharpe comes to tell papa." Then, full recollection smiting her, she moans to herself: "How to discover, for I will discover! I'll ask no father's blessing on my nuptials till I know!"

Pondering on this, an unutterable horror crushes her; she shudders: "If—if he is not my father, perhaps he killed my father!" but finally puts that idea away, Hampton's report of the Rock Springs fight showing there was no need of murder to produce death in that dread affair.

Forcing herself to calmness, the young lady goes downstairs and soon discovers things that add to her suspicion. To her relief, her father and Moncton have been long away on the business of getting the big bands of horses driven in from the prairie and the proper nags selected for delivery to the impatient Ranger Colonel.

Miss Godfrey is waited on at breakfast by the octo-noon. Toward the end of the meal, chancing to mention the loss of her picture rather nonchalantly, as if it were but a matter of passing moment, Estrella is astonished to see her maid's eyes grow apologetic and her manner greatly confused. "Come with me to my room, Zelma," the mistress says, assuming indifference as she places her coffee cup on the table, "and let us see if we cannot find that portrait together. It possibly dropped out of the locket before I left for San Antonio."

As they go upstairs her attendant gives Miss Godfrey a shock; she says, with equal carelessness: "What makes you and your father both so brisk about that picture?"

Estrella for the moment is too startled to reply to this; but in her room her suspicions become more vivid as she notes that her maid's examination of her chamber is entirely perfunctory. Inspiration smiting the

mistress, she suddenly cries: "Zelma, you know where that miniature is!"

"Miss 'Strella, what—what makes you think that?" stammers the octoroon.

"Why, because you're *not* looking for it. If you've carelessly lost this portrait from the locket, confess it to me and I promise pardon."

But the girl, who is trembling now, not answering her, the mistress cannot help imploring: "It—it is a picture of my mother's brother. I don't want to lose it. Tell me about it. Have I not always been good to you, Zelma?" and so finally works upon the feelings of her attendant that she sobs miserably: "Don't ask me, Miss 'Strella; don't ask me! If I told you I'd be skinned alive!"

"Ah, no doubt you would!" assents Estrella. She is now sure that her maid either took the portrait by Godfrey's orders or had seen him purloin it and been warned to keep a silent tongue. She breaks out in anger, half simulated, half real: "You carelessly have lost it. That's the reason you dare not open your lips to me. But I shan't tell my father about it because he'd punish you terribly. Though I shall punish you myself." She takes the young woman to the sewing room, gives her a big lot of sewing, and commands: "Don't dare to stir from here until this is finished!" but to make very sure, locks the culprit in.

Coming out of the room, she thinks: "Alone for hours!" With the exception of old Dinah, the cook, she and Zelma are the only inmates of the house. Dinah never leaves the kitchen; it is quite certain that Moncton and Godfrey will not return till evening from the corrals. She thinks desperately: "I'll search his room and get that picture."

Whereupon, safe from Zelma's eyes, she goes cautiously into what she had once called her father's bed-

room and investigates his wardrobe and his desk. This is a simple matter. The frontier planter's clothes are few, and his plain deal desk has but a country lock, the key of which is in it.

Carefully examining the pockets of his clothes, she finds nothing of importance in these; next she inspects the papers in his desk, which are not very numerous, most of his business documents being at the house he calls his office, but does not find the portrait. Though looking over the last package of papers, tucked away in an envelope, something meets her eyes that makes Estrella utter a shriek of rage. It is the letter she had written to Hampton.

This increases her determination to discover whether this man, who has assumed a father's authority over her, is really entitled to her love, duty and obedience. She must know that; she *will* know that! She murmurs to herself: "Oh, God, I loved him so!" But the letter in her hand makes her add bitterly: "He wasn't very merciful to me." Thinking of the picture, she cries to herself: "The face smiled at me from the past! 'Twas a recollection of childhood. I can see the dear eyes now. I will see again that picture!" Yet search how she will, and she seeks it in careless, reckless eagerness, she cannot find the miniature. Finally, concluding that the portrait must have been destroyed, she desperately determines: "There is one living witness who can say from his own eyes: 'This Jim Godfrey was Jim Godfrey before the fight at Rock Springs, and is—your father!' I'll send for Harry Love and bring them face to face!"

She writes a hurried note, orders her mare saddled, and rides off to the cabin of a hunter a little way up the San Antonio trail, where for a few dollars she knows she can get a Mexican to speed with the message that very day into the Pueblo town. She is alto-

gether too experienced now to trust the letter to an ox team.

But even in the act of dismounting at the hunter's cabin a sharp-eyed, brown-skinned *muchacho* comes spurring down the San Antonio trail, and, putting his cunning glance on her, promptly pulls up his mustang and, edging alongside of her, whispers: "*Pron-to, àqui Dona Yankee!*" and passes to her astonished but eager hand a thumb-worn and dirty slip of paper.

For a second she thinks it is some message from Hampton, but starts as she deciphers in half-printed, illiterate script:

"I've dropt on what nocked yer sensus out of ye. Yer guessed it! Down ter night with ividence. Until then keep mum as ye love yer life.

"KUTE HARRY."

As its full import smites her, the delicate girl almost falls from her horse. Her mighty suspicion has become a crushing and appalling certainty. She reels in her saddle, and mutters to herself: "Orphaned!"

CHAPTER XVI.

NIGHT ON THE LONE PLANTATION.

Before Estrella can collect her senses, the Mexican boy, apparently instructed, with a whispered "*Guarda!*" has ridden off. For a moment she is carried back into the past and sees the dying man by the desert spring, and her brown eyes grow full of tears at thought of her dead father.

Then her cruel situation forces the present on her. She had given this man called Godfrey a daughter's tender affection and loving kisses, and she feels a big

hole is in her heart. Fortunately, Harry's missive eradicates a good deal of this sentiment.

As she re-reads Love's scrawl the letters that are dim to her teary eyes grow very big in awful warning. "Keep mum as ye love yer life!" Until this time personal danger had not been in the girl's mind, but now it looms up and confronts her. She looks on the great estate this man has usurped from her, and thinks in quick discernment: "After he has slaved for it these many years, this man will do anything to keep it. That is why he wanted me to marry Moncton; then he'd be safe from me." Pondering over the matter, she makes a wild guess that Jasper had discovered her putative father's secret, and so had gained sufficient power over him to force him to divide the spoils. "This man had to take me as his daughter to be Jim Godfrey and have title to my dead father's gold that he dug up from the ruined hacienda, and these miles and miles of land fertile as God's gardens," she mutters; then jeers bitterly: "And now he would make me the bride of his accomplice, and so render me forever helpless and seal my lips eternally by wifely pride and wifely duty."

She gazes at the herds of cattle and bands of horses and gangs of toiling negroes, and utters, significantly: "It is a principality worth fighting for. For all this is mine and"—the sweet accents of devoted love coming into her voice—"and Sharpe's!"

From this reverie she is startled by a voice at her side. The man whom she had called father, riding up to her, says, authoritatively: "Daughter, I saw you from the field. You got a note from that Mexican boy." Her agitated face answers him; he commands: "Let me see it!"

But under an instinctive touch of the spur the agile Mulefoot bounds away, and before Estrella is overtaken by her surprised mentor she has wrapped the paper up

with three lucifer matches, that after the manner of the prairie she carries with her, and has ignited them on the pommel of her saddle. With her pursuer's hand upon her arm, she laughs as the tinder floats away from her on the breeze, and feels for the moment that she is safe.

Fortunately, Godfrey takes for granted from whom the note has been received, and commands tersely: "You come right home with me!"

Resistance would be useless, even if she cared just now to defy him. Miss Godfrey turns Mulefoot and rides doggedly beside him, and so enters the big patio, where, slipping from the side saddle, she stands upon the threshold of the house confronting him.

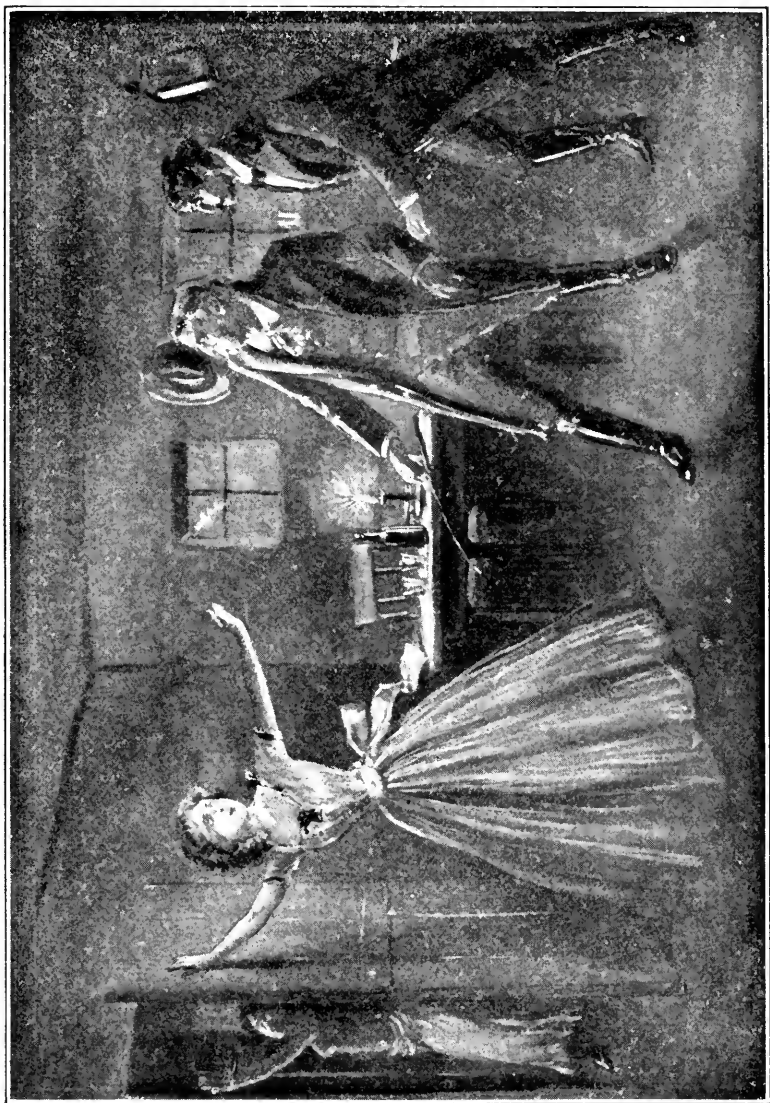
Godfrey doesn't get off his horse or the crisis might have come immediately. Still mounted, looking down at the girl as she makes a beautiful picture in her riding habit, her face flushed, her eyes rebellious, he says, sternly: "Ever since last night, daughter, I've noticed you've acted kind of queer;" then questions sharply: "You have met against my orders Captain Hampton in San Antonio?"

She turns her face haughtily to his and answers shortly: "Yes."

"Very well. You remember I told you I'd punish you if you ever had anything more to do with him. If you have lost your pride, by the Eternal, I haven't lost my pride as your father!"

Despite herself, the young lady cannot restrain a mocking, sneering laugh. It doesn't make her mentor more tender to her. He continues: "Now you go right up to your room and stay there till I let you leave it. I'm too busy now, but to-morrow, unless you do what I tell you, I'll tend to you frontier fashion."

But yesterday the girl would have been grieved at his condemnation and grown tearful at his reproof. Now



his threat eradicates her last tender feeling for him; with every vein in her body throbbing with indignation at his assumed parental authority, she bites her lips to restrain the angry, defiant words.

A moment after she answers haughtily, yet resignedly: "Yes, sir!" and goes up to her chamber quite content to get from his company, for she sees enough in his face to make it certain that a rash word might now put great danger upon her. Recollecting that to-night she will have Wild Harry's evidence to make her defy any interference by this man with her coming marriage, she laughs to herself savagely: "It is he who shall beg my mercy; not I, his!" and strides her room like an indignant Juno.

Soon tenderer and happier thoughts possess her. She remembers that this evening she will have at her side a man capable of protecting her from everything save the violence of her own love, and reflecting that in two days she is to be a bride, occupies herself pleasantly by packing a trunk for a simple honeymoon outing.

During this, towards evening, she is somewhat startled by hearing the man called Godfrey crying out from his bedroom, rather nervously and astoundedly: "Jasper, the devil's up! Someone's been searching all my things!" His hurried steps tell of agitation as he runs down the stairs apparently to seek conference with his coadjutor.

A little later, probably urged by Moncton, who wishes to see the woman whose beauty grows to him more tempting with her coldness, Godfrey sends Zelma to the young lady's chamber and desires she shall be at the supper table. "And master told me," pleads the maid, anxiously, "to make you look your best, Miss 'Strella."

"Make me look my best! Well, I should think so!"

cries Estrella. And, remembering she is being decked to meet her affianced husband, she selects for this summer evening an exquisite light frock of pure white muslin trimmed with simple ribbons.

Filled with sweetheart's bashful thoughts, under the octoroon's anxious attentions, the tears, and she has shed many of them this day, are washed from her cheeks, and she soon becomes as fresh and dainty as a rosebud. On her face is expectant happiness and hope as she sweeps down to astonish with her beauty the two men waiting for her below, and take her place at what she had once been very happy to call her father's table.

Then a curious, nervous meal goes on.

Though the conversation of Moncton and Godfrey is chiefly over coming crops and the horses they have sent off to San Antonio for the Ranger Colonel, there is a current of uneasiness apparent in their voices, and Estrella starts as she notes in the faces of these men some project not as yet developed. This nervous tension quickly affects the octoroon, who, dressed like a prim French maid, is waiting on them. Zelma's pearl-like complexion becomes pale as delicate china, and her plump white arms bared to the elbows for table attendance quiver as she arranges the dessert; for Godfrey, after remarking that some one has been sneaking about his bedroom, suddenly asks the attendant in terrible voice: "Wench, have you been rummaging my desk trying to find something to steal?" next chuckles: "By jinks, you look guilty; your legs are shaking under you as if you had the fever and ague!" the short skirt of the young woman making this easily apparent.

With her tongue almost cleaving to the roof of her mouth, Zelma answers in low, broken voice: "No, Mr. Godfrey, as God is my judge!"

"Reckon you'll find I'm the only judge about here!" jeers the old man, blasphemously. Apparently he has been bracing his nerves for some active measure by afternoon libations.

But the attentions of Jasper Moncton, who, towards the close of the meal has drawn his chair quite close to Miss Godfrey's, the confident smile upon his suave face and the possessive manner in which he would put his arm around her tempting waist, though she repels him both with eyes and hands, do not permit Estrella to think very much about this matter. Her diffidence and coyness now seemingly annoy the man who calls himself her father. In his eye comes a determination to force this fragile beauty, who had once been so pliable in her daughterly love, to do his will.

As he smokes he speaks, saying rather nervously between puffs of his cigar: "Jasper has been begging you off again, 'Strella; I have concluded to forget your disobedience if you do my bidding, daughter."

"And what is that?" asks the young lady, struggling to control her temper.

"Why, you just agree to marry Jasper, as you know are my wishes, and I'll excuse you just this once for running after that Ranger Captain."

"That I shall never do!" answers Estrella, and, rising haughtily, sweeps out of the room and goes to her chamber, because she is afraid of letting her tongue disclose too much.

Here she thinks pertinently: "An hour or two more and Hampton will come, and then—then I'll speak!"

But this inaction is not to be permitted to her. A few minutes after Zelma comes trembling into her chamber and shudders: "For God's sake, Miss 'Strella, protect me. You said you would—when I came here and gave up my liberty to be with you, you said you would."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, this. They're accusing me of breaking open and searching master's desk to find something to steal. God help me, they've—they've been drinking!" and even in the gloom the octoroon's eyes flash wild with terror. "They have told me that—that I am to go down to master's office to be whipped. Miss 'Strella, think of that—whipped because I've been rummaging master's desk trying to find something to steal!"

"That you shall never be!" Miss Godfrey's voice is cold, though her heart is throbbing as if it would break through the corsage that confines it. She knows now that to save the unfortunate Zelma she must tell of investigating Godfrey's desk. To give the real reason for her act, instinct warns her may put danger even on her life. She tries to invent some other plausible excuse or motive to render to this man, muttering nervously to herself: "If Hampton would but come!"

But she must act quickly! Godfrey has called from below: "Come along, you thieving wench; I'll teach you to sneak about my papers!" and Zelma has tremblingly run down to him. Some remarks about "going light on the girl and not spoiling her beauty for the New Orleans market" float up the stairway, to horrify Miss Godfrey.

As the sobs of the victim die away the mistress cries mentally: "Zelma shall not be punished for my act!" Taking a piece of paper, she hastily writes on it: "Find me at the office." With this in her hand she runs downstairs and leaves it on the dining-room table for Hampton's eye in case he should come during her absence.

Then, reckless of everything but her errand of mercy, Miss Godfrey issues from the house and follows the two men, who have already led their victim out of the big patio and are well on their way down the road to

Godfrey's office. She has forgotten coming sweetheart; obliterated from mind is Harry's promised evidence; likewise is even banished the danger that she may bring upon herself, if by any inadvertence she discloses that she knows she is not this man's daughter, as picking up her dainty skirts Estrella flits with light feet through the road made dusty by wagon teams from Matagorda and stands before the rough one-story adobe building called Godfrey's office. She has scarcely ever been in the place, having had a kind of horror of it, because she knows that sometimes slaves connected with household or stables are punished in its rear room, the regular whipping post of the plantation being down among the distant negro quarters.

Its floor being raised but little over the surrounding prairie, the windows of the building are scarce two feet above the path outside. The night being warm, these are wide open, and she glances into the front room.

At one side of it is a small iron safe for papers connected with the plantation. Several ledgers and a well-thumbed memorandum book lie on its unplanned deal table; from this a couple of candles in tin candlesticks emit a subdued, flickering light. Both Godfrey and Moncton are seated on rough, wooden chairs in careless poses, the evening being very sultry, smoking their cigars nonchalantly, and comfortably drinking their whiskey from a bottle and glasses already placed upon the table.

Estrella shudders as she sees these men coolly taking their ease, unmindful of the trembling woman, who apparently is in the rear room preparing for her torture; for a subdued sobbing is heard through the slight partition mingled with the rustle of feminine garments being hastily removed. Though she is so excited that the whole scene seems blurred to her, her senses are

so strained she even notes the odor of a honeysuckle that is climbing about the window and that a swarm of mosquitoes and insects attracted from the prairie are burning themselves to death in the flames of the candles on the table.

But, above all, one thing impresses itself upon the delicate girl, the awful loneliness of the place. The lights from the negro quarters are very distant. The nearest cabin of a frontiersman or hunter is a mile away. Only the gloom of a summer night is near to her. She shudders as she thinks: "What aid is there for me from any one here against the acknowledged autocrat of this lone plantation and his overseer?" Love's warning grows very vivid in her mind as to her ears come these significant words in Moncton's acute voice: "Did you notice, Jim, that 'Strella has never once called you dad since we came from San Antonio?"

"Yes, and by the Lord Harry I'm going to find out what she means by it!" snarls Godfrey.

Here the sight of a long, lithe, torturing rawhide switch lying on the table makes Estrella desperately lay her hand upon the latch.

As the girl comes in, it is as if a fairy were entering the den of ogres, for the whole place smells of liquor and has that rough, unkempt, bald appearance common to the frontier far from the refining touch of woman.

As they see her the triumph upon both men's faces tells their visitor that her coming is what they want; though the man whom she once called father, hastily rising, asks: "Daughter, what's your business here?"

"To protect the girl I brought with me from New York," she answers, determinedly. "You shall not punish Zelma!"

"Reckon a little'll do her good," says Godfrey. "She deserves it. The wench has been rummaging about

my desk trying to find something to steal; unless," he adds, significantly, "some one else did it."

This increases Estrella's perturbation. She guesses that they suspect she has been investigating Godfrey's desk, and have lured her here on this errand of mercy to coerce her by her sympathy with the unfortunate octoroon into confessing her act and telling her reason for it.

With a shudder she remembers Harry's warning: "As ye love yer life keep mum!" and, loving life very much now, as coming brides do, for one coward moment she hesitates.

But Godfrey's action forces her to generous resolution. Picking up the torturing switch of twisted rawhide, he calls, savagely: "Wench, are you ready in there?" and a scream has answered through the partition: "Master, for God's sake, spare me!"

He is stepping to the door, but Miss Godfrey is in front of him. To him she says, holding up a white hand in commanding gesture: "You shall not torture Zelma! It was I who investigated your desk!"

At this Moncton springs up with a muttered execration, and the faces of both men tell Estrella that they fear she guesses some secret they will protect with their lives or—with her life. But it only braces her nerves and makes her throbbing brain more acute.

"You were going through my desk," mutters Godfrey, hoarsely, "to find what?" Though he tries to conceal it, his face is convulsed with both terror and menace.

Moncton himself has come a little closer to her, his features full of awful inquiry.

"To find what?" repeats the man she had once thought her father.

"This!" cries the girl in sudden inspiration, and, plunging her hand through the laces of her corsage,

she draws from her throbbing bosom the note she had found. "This, my letter that you intercepted; my missive to Captain Hampton!"

At her words immense relief ripples the faces of both her inquisitors.

"Oh, Hampton, the Comanche killer!" sneers Moncton, his attitude growing more easy, though his face is flushed with jealous rage.

"Of course I did," says Godfrey in fatherly tones. "It was my duty to keep you from making a lovesick fool of yourself, daughter." He gives a sigh of relief, sits down in a chair and relights his cigar.

Perhaps the awful denouement that is drawing about them might be averted, for Estrella has called into the door of the rear room: "Zelma, you're saved. Go back to the house, poor girl!" and is herself stepping to the entrance of the building, anxious to get away from the two men whom she now loathes; but at this moment Moncton, made fervid by the ethereal beauty of this priestess of mercy, who looks in her simple muslin frock exquisite as a sylph, bars her way, and says, insinuatingly: "You've begged the wench off from your father. Now you'll have to beg her off from me. You see there was a fellow named Him Jones came up to Matagorda from Corpus Christi, and he didn't know I was boss of this estate, and got to laughing and chatting in a barroom about your octoroon beauty who was going to gallivant with Mr. Yazoo Sam. You see, in old times I knew Yazoo Sam very well, and he was great at running off niggers. We——" Jasper checks himself and continues smilingly: "But perhaps you didn't notice your wench's didos. Reckon you were too much taken up with that dragoon fellow, young Pelham, I believe his name was. Him Jones was talking about him, too," and, getting closer to the lovely object of his passion,

whispers: "You can save the wench by a single kiss. You know how I have loved you since I saw you at Saratoga. Why don't you marry me and make everything quiet and settled on the plantation?"

"Yes, that's the ticket," breaks in Godfrey. "Marry Jasper. You know he's the man I want you to take. Don't keep on your high horse!"

To this Miss Godfrey, fighting to restrain words that may bring discovery upon her, says, coldly: "I have already answered no to that question."

"Oh, you won't give me a kiss? Very well," laughs Moncton. "Then Zelma shall sing a little song to Mr. Yazoo Sam!" and would step towards the inner room.

But Miss Godfrey stands before him and commands: "I forbid you to lay a hand upon my property!"

"Your property! That's good!" jeers Jasper, arrogantly. "Reckon you don't exactly understand your position here!"

At this Godfrey falters: "Don't rile him, daughter, or he'll turn us out paupers on the prairie. Marry him to save your poor old father. Don't you know he's got a bill of sale of everything on the plantation? Don't put on city airs, child, you're only the daughter of a plain backwoodsman, anyway!"

But this man's continually calling himself her father drives the girl frantic. Forgetting prudence, she cries, mockingly: "A bill of sale of *my* plantation from you? Pish, it's not worth the paper it's written on!"

"What do you mean?" This in a whisper from both men.

"I mean that you are not Jim Godfrey, that you are not my father!" And the daughter of a plain backwoodsman becomes haughty as a Juno, the lights of the candles flash on her white arms and panting bosom, the thought that she had given this wretch a daughter's kisses, a daughter's love, makes her toss prudence

to the winds and break out: "Interloper! Liar! Usurper! My father died at the Rock Springs fight ten years ago! Now both you and your accomplice off this plantation, that is MINE!"

Even as this leaves her lips she remembers Love's warning, and would check her words, but the actions of the men before her tell her it is too late. For Godfrey has muttered with an awful curse: "By Heaven, she knows!" and Moncton has locked the door leading to the outer world.

She is alone with two monsters, who shock her by holding whispered consultation, all the time keeping their eyes upon her as if they were beasts of prey and she was to be their victim. She hears one mutter: "You fool, to make me bring her from New York!" and the other answer: "By Heaven, I'll have her, anyway!" From very force of habit Estrella's hands go to the silken sash that girds her slight waist seeking for the Ranger's pistols, but with a sigh she remembers she has left the weapons in her chamber.

Then the two men come to her and smite her with a monstrous proposition. "Now, Jim, to save her life she must marry me right off!" says Moncton, shortly.

"Yes, marriage with you is the only thing that will stop her lips sure," mutters Godfrey; adding, in cruel significance: "except the *other* thing."

Here the girl in her terror, for she sees they mean by "the other thing" her death, makes a false step. Hoping to frighten them, she says, haughtily: "That's impossible! To-morrow I marry Sharpe Hampton!"

At this the two men look at each other wildly. They know that if she has promised herself to Hampton neither man nor devil will keep the Ranger from coming bride. Driven desperate, Godfrey remarks, huskily: "So much the more reason you marry Jasper *now!*"

"Yes, mating with me is the trick that will stop her gabbing!" cries Moncton, adding, with saturnine acuteness, "and stop Sharpe Hampton, too!"

"Stop Sharpe Hampton from making me his wife when he loves me?" jeers Estrella. "Stop him when he says I am his sun in heaven? Stop him——"

But Moncton's crafty rejoinder paralyzes her white lips. "*You* can stop him mighty quick!" he says, suavely. "When you're bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, the Ranger Captain's too high-stomached a fellow to take such a jilting. He'll keep away from you as if you were poison and ask no questions." To this he adds in words that seem like blows upon the threatened one's heart: "You have got to marry me or be buried before morning!"

"Don't you see, fool, that it is the only thing that can save your life?" whispers the man called Godfrey. "We daren't let you live. Do you suppose that I'm going to be thrown out of wealth and possessions that have grown in my hands all these years and be twisted from a nabob into an outcast pauper in a second?"

"I'll—I'll deed you my property!" screams the frightened girl, "only let me go!"

"Shucks, a deed under these circumstances wouldn't be worth a cent!" says Moncton. "Besides, I want you! I haven't dreamt of your loveliness and hungered for your caresses these two years to give 'em up now! You've got to give in, my beauty, and become my wife right off!"

Then the room grows red with horror to the victim's eyes as Godfrey says, huskily, as if ashamed of his own words: "There's a nigger parson down at the quarters can do the business good enough in five minutes. Your being Jasper's flesh and blood will keep your lips shut forever. You have got to be Jasper's right now or die right here!"

For a second the horror of her position is hardly real to the half fainting girl, but the proposed bridegroom's eyes lighting up in unholy rapture at the loveliness he thinks already in his arms, makes Estrella a goddess of purity assailed by shame.

Her face, cheeks and bosom grow red as fire, then pale as the death that she elects. She says simply: "You can kill me, but I live Sharpe Hampton's!" next raises her voice and cries desperately: "Help! Hampton, help! I need you!"

"Quit screaming or we've got to kill you!" mutters Godfrey. Already he has one hand upon her white throat and seems to be raising the other to strike her senseless.

Again the sweet young voice rings through the still night air: "Hampton! Sharpe! Save me!"

Then, even as her senses become dull and the scene sways mistily before her eyes, the angel of death descends and protects this maiden from two satyrs.

On the trail outside two sharp revolver cracks ring out so rapidly they make almost one report. The man who had called himself Miss Godfrey's father falls upon the swooning girl, and the other, his accomplice, is a dead body ere he reaches the bloody floor.

* * * * *

A few minutes later Estrella finds herself lying in a chair, her face wet and herself being brought to her senses by kindly slappings of her hands and shoulders. She says, dreamily, though there is a strange interrogation in her voice: "Did you put me in this chair?"

"No, I found ye there," answers Mr. Love, astonished admiration making his wild eyes very big.

But she, staring about and seeing blood upon her dress and the bodies lying on the floor, springs up and shudders: "Who killed these men?"

"Shucks, don't git frightened, girl, after ye've fit the scrimmage," says Wild Harry, reassuringly. "Yer did it fine. That feller over there was plugged straight between the eyes," he points to Moncton, "and this cadoodler ain't got many breaths in his body." He indicates her putative father. "Don't take on so; they desarved it. Reckon 'dad' got onto yer knowing he wasn't 'dad' a leetle before I got down, and then yer gave it to 'em straight. Hampton taught yer to shoot the pistol, didn't he? I'd have done it myself if I'd have been here."

At this Estrella asks in astounded voice: "And you didn't shoot them?"

"No such luck," answers Love; then mutters: "What do yer want to possum it on me fer? Ye must have shot 'em! But I'll make everything safe for ye. A coroner's jury'll soon bring in a verdict of 'served 'em right' when I'm yer witness."

These last words are interrupted by a moaning plea for water from the man called Godfrey.

Estrella cannot forget that she once held daughter's love for this man, and her quick hands pour the liquid between his ashen lips and try to soothe the passing of his spirit.

On this Love breaks in, saying, sternly: "Roger Norton, the best thing you can do with your last few breathin's is to square yourself by telling all about it."

"Roger Norton! Is that your name?" cries 'Strella, and looks curiously at the dying man.

"I recognized ye as soon as I put eyes on ye, Roger Norton," says Wild Harry, "Ye were her dad's clerk who went up with him on his hunt for the Gran Quevira, and thus escaped massacre down here. Ye thought ye'd take Jim Godfrey's place, seein' every one was dead, and so to seize on the plantation ye lassed the daughter. That's about straight, isn't it?"

"Yes," gasps the man, "there—there isn't much to tell."

"But still," commands Love, "ye put it down on paper, Strella; writin' always makes things easy."

And the girl, sitting at the deal table, inscribes hurriedly the tale the wounded man in low voice gasps out:

"I—I saw a big chance with everybody dead who knew Godfrey in these parts, and I—I took it. I became Jim Godfrey. 'Twasn't so hard for six years. No one ever came round this place but new emigrants, new niggers and Indians and Mexicanos. I—I meant to do the right thing by you, and would have left you the property till that devil, Jasper Carew Moncton, came along. He had not known Godfrey, but he thought he recollected me in old Mississippi days. He suspected me. Somehow he was aware Jim Godfrey was a Knight of the Golden Circle. He gave me the grips and signals of the secret order. I could not return them. So he finally made sure that I was not Jim Godfrey, but Roger Norton that he had once seen as purser's clerk on the Mississippi River. Then he—he worked on my fears and got a hold on me, and—and then, when he'd gone up North and seen you, 'Strella, he got wild for you and would have me bring you down so that he could, if necessary, force you to be his, and—and you know the rest. I meant to be pretty good to you, and I hope you'll forgive me as—as far as you can." The poor creature, sighing his life out, looks pleadingly at her.

But the girl suddenly asks: "Tell me, who killed you?"

"I—I don't know."

Then she, bringing the paper to him, half sobs, half gasps: "Sign this, and I'll forgive you," and the frontiersman, lifting the expiring wretch higher, he

succeeds in putting his name beneath his dying revelation; then his head drops, as he falls forward on the floor.

"And now," says Estrella, eagerly, "please let me write that you were killed while making an attack upon me, that——" She pauses. The eyes of the man who had called himself Godfrey are closed, his breath has gone.

"What's all this strange palaver about?" mutters Love. "Nobbody's going to hurt ye for killing them skunks!"

"No, but I didn't kill them."

"Well, who did? It warn't me, though I'd been proud to do it."

"I—I think it was Sharpe," whispers the girl, nervously.

"'Tain't possible!" cries Love, indignantly, "or this fellow Moncton would have been dead as quick as the other. Sharpe Hampton don't shoot twice at a man."

"But I might have been in the way. I stood so——"

"Yes—reckon he'd have to shoot a leetle high to avoid ye. Perhaps it was Sharpe Hampton."

"But Zelma can tell!" And Estrella runs into the next room. Putting her hand on the shoulder of the shrinking octoroon, Miss Godfrey asks: "Zelma, who fired those shots?"

"I don't know, miss; I don't know," mumbles the poor cringing creature who is still half nude in preparation for her chastisement. "I was waiting here when I heard their awful words to you, then the reports. Next I heard some one in that room kissing you and, seems to me, I distinguished: 'For God's sake, I didn't mean to kill your father!' But those fearful men are dead, and I'm only your slave—ain't I, Miss Strella, only your slave?"

This her mistress does not answer. She has run

out into the other room, where Harry is calling: "Look here! Here's a piece of paper kept in place by a bowie knife stuck in it, and we never see'd it. We'd make fine spies, we would!"

Upon it has been agitatedly scrawled: "Good-bye. Forgive me."

"That's Sharpe's writin', straight enough!" mutters Wild Harry, "but I never knew his hand could tremble before."

"It is my first, my last love letter!" screams Estrella, and seizes it, kisses it and fondles it.

Then Harry mutters: "Wall, I'm darned if this don't beat conniption fits!"

For the girl is crying to him: "Get on your horse! After him! Sharpe Hampton thinks he's killed my father, and that this wretch's blood stands between his love and me. After him! Bring him back to me! I promised to marry him to-morrow. After him! Find him before he gets down on the Rio Grande and throws his life away in some wild skirmish because he thinks he's killed my father and can never call me wife! After him, and bring him back!"

BOOK V.

BEYOND THE RIO GRANDE.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLORITO'S FANDANGO.

It is a hot, sultry summer night well south of the Rio Grande, on the most southern of all roads leading from Camargo, first over low cactus-covered chaparral plains called the Tierra Caliente, then through the foothills of the Cordilleras to Monterey and Saltillo. This road, passing by the little adobe town of China, avoided by the main divisions of Taylor's Army, has not been cut up by trains of wagons transporting provisions and camp equipage or guns of the artillery, though it has been scouted over and ridden over by Texan Rangers and Dragoons, who have cleared it of the Rancheros and the regular Mexican cavalry of General Ampudia, who holds in force the town and citadel of Monterey.

Upon this road, grown dusty under the hoofs of cavalry, stands a little hamlet near the first foothills of the mountains, pleasantly shaded by some palmettos, palms and century plants that indicate it is still near the Tierra Caliente, though it is watered by a stream whose swiftly flowing, cool water as it hurries to join the San Juan River shows that it rises in the heights of the Sierra Madre.

Within this hamlet this sultry night, though the

breeze from the mountain tempers it, for the benefit and amusement of the ferocious Yankee voluntarios is being given a fandango. The Mexican *mozos* and *leperos*, cringingly doffing their sombreros, have gathered in the prettiest *poblanas* and *manolas* of the town, though they grind their yellow teeth and snarlingly feel their machetes when out of immediate observation. For the bright eyes of the *senoritas* flash alluringly to the wooing of these Yankee desperadoes, who are very ardent in their "lovings" to Juanita, Inezita or Lolita, now that Sally, Molly and Annie are "to hum" in far-away Kentucky or Tennessee, and who practise the good old-fashioned soldier routine:

"If you cannot make love to the lips that are dear,
At least you can kiss the lips that are near."

Under live oaks lighted by torches, the *salle de danse* being a smooth, well-beaten circle of earth surrounded by tables for gaming and likewise the sale of *tortillas*, *frijoles*, *dulces* and *aguardiente*, *pulque*, and other liquids of the country, a merry crowd of Texan Rangers and Uncle Sam's troopers are engaged in loving, polkaing, smoking, drinking and gambling. These are interspersed with Mexicans who smile between their snarls, and *senoritas* whose white chemises scarcely veil their charms of busts and shoulders, and whose short, bright-colored petticoats do not entirely conceal their graceful legs and ankles. Under the feet of everybody roam a drove of hairless Mexican dogs, struggling to get a snap at tortillas and frijoles, yet snarling, yelping and howling under the kicks from the big boots of Rangers and troopers.

In addition, a banner announces "Florito's Troupe of Artists from the *Nuave de Teatro*, City of Mexico." These add to the entertainment a one-legged clown, whose performance of a maimed athlete seems to amuse the careless crowd, and a boy whose hand-

springs and flip-flaps are more those of an orang-outang than a human being.

But after a little the stellar artiste of the company, coming out with languishing eyes and coquettish songs, sends the concourse wild with the ever popular "*La Ponchada*." Then changing from song to dance, she is greeted by some wild "*Vayas!*" and "*Buenos!*" from the Mexicans, and cries of "Keep it up!" "Go it heel and toe!" and "Fling yer shanks lively!" from *los Yankees*.

These are acknowledged by "Bully for Uncle Sam's voluntarios!" from the archly naive figurante, who with flashing eyes, flowing hair and waving of rebozo, throws her agile limbs very gracefully to the music of guitar and mandolin, clanking her castanets in *cachucha* and tapping her tambourine in *bolero*.

But her *cachucha* and *bolero* being finished, the sylph goes about laughing and chatting and even drinking glasses of wine with the assemblage, holding out tambourine for reward, though her attentions are chiefly directed to the boys of Uncle Sam; to whom, being more liberal than her compatriots, she says, archly: "*Pesos por me!* Nothing less than a dollar goes! *Sabé!* Big silver dollars! Ah, you handsome *Gringos diablos!*"

Coming out of the crowd with her tambourine packed full of money and jingling it merrily about, under a torch-lighted oak, she pauses, starts as if a snake had stung her pretty bare legs, and mutters: "Caramba, you here!" and faces the drooping and beautiful figure and sad, earnest face of Estrella Godfrey.

"I have been watching for you," says the American girl, and would put gold into the dancing girl's tambourine, remarking, eagerly: "Carmelita, you remember how you saved him and me on the prairie. Have you seen him?"

"Him? *Caspita*, you mean the gallant Captain!" cries the dancing girl; then shudders: "From you; never!" With a shame-faced gesture she rejects haughtily the proffered guerdon.

But a lithe little Mexican, just behind her, cries: "*Caramba*, jealous idiot, you refuse gold!" and seizes the half-eagle from Miss Godfrey's fingers. "Florito is not so dainty!" then snarls: "*Demonios*, you're dropping all the money out of the tambourine!" With this her patron takes the instrument from the listless fingers of his subject, who is staring agitatedly at Miss Godfrey.

Then takes place a curious, half-incoherent interview broken in upon and interspersed with the chinking of money and the cries of gamblers from the neighboring tables and the thumbing of mandolins, guitars and the shrieking of a fiddle from the Mexican musicians; the two girls making exquisite contrast in the torch-light that is now mellowed by the moon rising over the spurs of the Sierra Madre. Carmelita, in snowy chemisette and red-tinted skirt carelessly worn Mexican fashion in half-savage nudity, is a picture of barbaric passion; Estrella Godfrey, clothed for her journey in the saddle over Mexican trails in the Indian costume she had worn on the prairie, might be barbarous also, such are her flashing eyes and agitated gestures, did not a pathetic sadness dominate and make soft her wildest emotions.

"You have been riding? You have got that wild-eyed Ranger Harry with you!" whispers Carmelita. "I saw you come in this evening escorted by that troop of Yankee cavalry. As I thought, you seek *il Capitan Hampton*." Then her eyes blaze and she mutters: "But you, *Dona Americana*, shall not find him—not through Carmelita."

"I must, or he'll be dead soon!" sighs Estrella.

"They tell me such stories of his careless, reckless exposure in every skirmish and fight he can get into."

"*Jesus*, he is brave, isn't he? Resigned from the Texan Rangers—Madre de Dios, as if they didn't get killed enough—and organized the Spy Company, free to find death in the Mexican lines, men who don't want to come back; his first lieutenant an English lord who was shooting buffalo on the plains and learned his wife had run away with a duke; his second officer, the little daredevil they call 'The Bravo,' the pet of a Louisiana plantation until his sweetheart was seduced by a New York gambler; then he killed the gambler, and has come down here to get himself killed; a dear little boy who smokes cigarettes while bullets fly about him, and each night dreams of home and mutters: 'Mother.' The rest of them, frontiersmen whose wives and daughters have been carried off by Indians; borderers whose families and sweethearts have been slaughtered by rancheros; each a despairing man who wants to die but sell his life, and all driven to despair by our sex, *Dona Americana*."

At this dread description of her sweetheart's command Estrella Godfrey's eyes grow agonized. She cries: "You have seen him fight?"

"Seen him fight?" cries Carmelita. "*Diablo*, how these despairing men massacred the lancers of Carrabijol! Ha, ha, ha! It is great to see Sharpe Hampton fight!"

"It is!" cries Hampton's fiancée, her eyes lighting up also.

"*Ay di me*, and for you, *Americana*," sighs the dancing girl. "That is more than he ever did for me except when he quirted little Florito, who is counting and stealing my money, because Florito was going to beat me."

"Ah, then in gratitude to him, tell me where I can

find him and take despair from him?" pleads Miss Godfrey. "Otherwise, I—I'll only see his dead body. You know these mountains ahead of us. Aid me to get word to him."

"Word of what?" Shame flushes the expressive features of the figurante; she asks eagerly: "How many letters have you written?"

"Oh, many," moans Estrella, "besides verbal messages by dragoons riding to the front."

"*Caramba*, dragoons don't overtake Sharpe Hampton!" jeers Carmelita; then breaks forth into a nervous rhapsody: "The Spy Company! Always in front of all! The Spy Company! Sixty men leave Matamoros; now there are only thirty left. Always in front; always seeking death; blue chip men, who risk their lives on a revolver shot. Always fighting; always dying; crazy men led by a crazy chief!"

"Ah, you have seen him!" whispers Miss Godfrey. "You know where he is. Take me to him that I may make him want to live!"

"And you have written how many letters to him to make him want to live?" asks Carmelita, in nervous eagerness.

"Ah, yes, from Matamoros five; two from Camargo."

"*Diablo*, seven!"

"And you'll take me to him?"

"How can I? I am but a girl helpless as you with fighting men and battling armies. Ask that young dragoon army officer, the one by whose side you rode today;" and Carmelita goes, jeeringly, away from the half-despairing American girl.

But out of sight, concealed from her rival by a cactus hedge, and she gets to counting on her fingers: "One—two—three—yes, seven. I have them all! All that came to the crazy Captain who cares so little for his life he is willing to toss it on the Mexican lances;

who some day, diablo, will perhaps get crazy enough to love me. And yet, when one night as he slept on the open prairie, I crawled through the grass to him to put my lips on his, and even in his sleep he turned away from me and whispered her name: 'Strella.' Then I could have driven knife through him or through myself. But better drive it through her now she's here! I knew she'd come. Something told me. Come to tell him she forgives him for something that's driving him crazy because he thinks he's lost her. But I can stop her—stop her forever! Why not? Why did not Dona Highhorse keep up North, where she ought to be—immodest thing following a man?"

Into her half-crazy rhapsody is now insinuated the soft, suggestive voice of her patron. Little Florito, coming beside the dancing girl, whispers: "The American *rica*, the daughter of Godfrey, who owns the enormous flocks and herds and plantations in Texas, we missed her once. This time we will have her, a grand ransom. Here, far away in the recesses of the Sierra Madre, we can make Dona Godfrey so unhappy, she will be willing to write that they send whole mule-loads of silver dollars for her rescue. *Santos*, last time I think you played us a little false for love of that Texan Captain. Now——"

"Now," whispers Carmelita, "now, when she is alone, no mercy is in my heart!"

"Then come, I'll tell you my little plan. Dona Estrella is seeking the man she loves. We will aid her, *diablo*, we will aid her!"

At this Carmelita bursts into a mocking, jeering laugh, and follows her patron for true Mexican dagger-in-the-back plotting.

As for Miss Godfrey, after having turned away hopeless of any aid from Carmelita, she goes to seeking among the gambling, laughing, dancing throug

about the tables the wild-eyed Harry Love. Exclamations that arise over the twanging of the guitars and mandolins embarrass the young lady.

"Whaugh," says a Texan Ranger, "draw a bead on Josefa's ankles; never saw purtier in old Kaintuck!"

"Come on, boys, lets give the Greasers a Virginny reel!" cries another, leading out a bright-eyed poblana. "Don't show your teeth, my little jealous Tomasito," he adds, "or I'll knock them down yer yaller belly." This is addressed to a snarling Mexican who resents the enlèvement of his sweetheart.

As for Mr. Love, he is imbibing aguardiente, and has hilariously exclaimed: "Golly, ain't drunk so much since I war weaned!" Then he laughs to a little manola of imploring eyes: "No, can't have all my monte winnings this trip," chinking some silver dollars in his hands, "but I'll give ye one of these hyar to flip my heels wid ye," and would lead the *muchacha* to the dance did not at this moment his eyes rest upon his beautiful charge, who in dejected attitude is looking sadly on. "Here's yer dollar," he cries to the poblana, "go and dance with Tomasito!" and, turning away, comes to Miss Godfrey, who is at the outskirts of the crowd.

At the little adobe house where she has taken up her quarters and been made quite comfortable for a few silver dollars by the Mexican family that live in it, he says, in answer to the somewhat reproachful glance of the young lady and her inquiries: "Have you heard any news of him?" "I ain't so full of mescal as I look. I kin think and talk straight as a rifle ball. From the gab of some of May's Dragoons, they calkerlate they'll overtake Sharpe some time if he ain't killed fust. They say the talk at headquarters is that Hampton's Spy Company has done more reliable scouting than any other gang of Rangers. Old Rough and

Ready's gone sweet on him, and that they'll offer him a captaincy in the Rifles like they're going to give Sam Walker, if Sharpe lives to git it."

"Lives to get it! Oh, if I could see him and tell him that that wretch's blood doesn't stand between us, then perhaps he'll live!" breaks out the girl, despairingly; next sighs: "Sometimes, Harry, I fear some one's stopping my communications to my affianced. You know how you rode after him down to Matamoros. He had left there; but you sent on my letter to the front. You had to return to your command. Now, thank God, the Ranger Colonel has given you dispatches to Hampton, though I don't think it is much more than simply 'For God's sake, Sharpe, don't throw away your life too carelessly!' something of that nature! Hays in his kind heart calls it a dispatch and makes it your military duty to get this on from China. He gave it to my teary eyes, to my beseeching, that's all! He let me have you, Harry, to take me to the man I love! To the man who is going to die."

"Yas, we're all a-gone to die," remarks Love, philosophically, "if we git on much further. We're now with the foremost cavalry troop, and if we go ahead of 'em, Lord knows what'll happen to us. I kin fight for ye as good as any man. I kin kill a few dozen Greasers, I hope, before I go under, but there's too many dozen to kill."

"Yes, but I must see him. If he'd only join the main army and take his chances with the rest. He must soon, if he lives. They're all gathering together now before Monterey to storm it. Then he'd have the chance of any other man. Now Sharpe has no chance at all, I think. You know if he had hope of me he wouldn't try to throw his life away. Get me to him!"

"Wall, I'll—I'll see what I kin do. You know the country from now on will be full of rancheros, and

Hampton's away south of Monterey on the Saltillo road, I calculate, trying to see if the Mexicans are sending any reinforcements to join Ampudia. But I'll—I'll take a look about and talk to you a little later."

The frontiersman goes away, leaving the girl anxiously pacing the mud floor of the adobe hut and sighing to herself: "How to reach him? How to reach him?"

In this she is interrupted by little Florito, who comes to her, a very suave look upon his olive face and a pleasant twinkle in his beady dark eyes. Stroking his long moustache and setting jauntily his red sash over his big bell-shaped trousers, and clanking his big spurs on his yellow boots, he says: "Honored Dona, I heard your request to Carmelita. You wish to be guided to il Capitan Hampton. I can get you there for——"

"For what?" asks Estrella, eagerly.

"For a hundred silver pesos, or I'll take it in gold. I'm not particular about little matters. I know a safe trail slightly south of here, more towards Montemorelos, that will reach the village where Hampton should be to-morrow."

"You are sure you can get me to Captain Hampton?" Miss Godfrey's tone implies doubt.

"*Quien sabe?* I can try," mutters the Mexican. "If not to-morrow, certainly the next day. Are you willing to take the risks? There will be some."

"Yes, any risk! I will speak of your offer to Mr. Love, who has dispatches for the Captain from the Texan Colonel. He will go with me."

"Oh, the Wild Eyed Harry. He will go with you? *Bueno*, speak to him. Then tell me if you wish to meet Captain Hampton."

The Mexican goes away, cursing to himself: "*Diablo*, if that crazy Texan Ranger went with us, at first

sign of treachery poor Florito would become vulture meat. Not Wild Harry, *por amor de Dios!*"

In this he is aided by the Texan himself. Miss Godfrey, coming to Love, says: "Harry, good news. A little Mexican who is the head of the dancing troupe, who displays the one-legged clown and Carmelita, the dancing girl, and the boy who turns somersaults, he tells me that he knows a trail south of here. For a hundred pesos he will guide us through it to the village where Hampton must be to-morrow or the next day."

At this Love, turning his eyes upon her, cries: "Not much! That moon has made ye lunny! Trust ourselves to that little sneaking yaller belly? No sirree! We'd have a hundred rancho lancers around us. We'd be gobbled!"

"But he says he will swear on the Virgin that——"

"No, Miss Godfrey," answers the Ranger. "I'd never, if I lived to git through, dare to tell Sharpe that I let ye put such risk upon yerself. Besides, 'tain't possible ye'd git through! Ye put that wild idea out of yer head. Git inter yer blankets and sleep it off!" and goes away, leaving the girl more unhappy than ever.

But into her reverie comes Carmelita, and whispers to her sweetly, but passionately: "You say, Yankee dona, you have news that if given to il Capitan Hampton would prevent his throwing his life away, which, *ay de mi*, I fear he will do soon. No man can take such chances forever. Escopeta balls pierce a gallant heart as well as a coward's. If you wish to give word to him, I'll try to aid you."

"But Mr. Love says it isn't possible we'd get through."

"Doubtless that would be true with a few armed soldiers, but Florito's performing troupe will not be

touched by rancheros. We are free of attack. One night we dance to Canales's Mexicans; the next night we amuse Gillespie's Rangers or McCulloch's Mounted Men. We're free to all. Now, if you alone go with us, you become a member of Florito's travelling troupe, a dancing girl like myself, eh?"

"Oh, goodness!" half-shudders Miss Godfrey, blushing and gazing at the outre costume in which Carmelita stands before her. But a moment after she adds: "Still, I might journey with you. You might say I was a dancing girl, and I could keep my face veiled, after the manner of the Mexicanas, and I don't think I'd be noticed."

"Of course not. Come with us. The hundred pesos for Florito. Come with us, but don't tell Wild Eyed Harry. A word to him, and he wouldn't let you go. He has already warned you, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"It is your option. You can have word with Captain Hampton, or you can let him die unknowing what you wish to say."

"I'll have word with Captain Hampton!" answers Estrella, excitedly. "That wretch's blood shall not forever stand between us. Here's your hundred pesos." She gives it to Carmelita in gold from a little sack she carries at her belt. "Go make the arrangements. What time do we leave?"

"At two o'clock in the morning, when all sleep. But we must go out quietly," and Carmelita departs.

To herself, Estrella communes devotedly: "I'll take the chance. It has been so weary waiting—a month—and he thinking all the time that wretch's blood was that of my father, and so there could be no hope for us together in this life. Yes, I'll see Sharpe to-morrow or the next day. See him! O, Heaven, will the clouds pass away and the sunshine break forth upon us again!"

After a moment Miss Godfrey, becoming calmer, sits down and writes in pencil—there is no pen and ink in the place—upon some pages of a memorandum book certain instructions to Mr. Martin, her old guardian, who by this time, she thinks, must be at the Hacienda of Live Oaks taking charge of its enormous estate, for now she has discovered large sums of money in New Orleans banks and the tremendous flocks and herds and fields of which she is possessed. But her riches have perhaps only hastened her speeding after her affianced, separated from her by his terrible misapprehension.

Unable to get news to Hampton, Estrella had desperately come down to Matamoras, then up the Rio Grande to Camargo, where she had left Zelma behind her, wishing to be free for rapid travel, the octoroon being unaccustomed to horse exercise. So she, riding Indian fashion, as she had come over the prairie, with revolvers in her belt, under Love's escort, had journeyed, overtaking various columns of Taylor's infantry and regiments of cavalry and battalions of artillery. As the fair girl has passed through the rough soldiers' hats have been raised quietly to her, they thinking she is some young widow or some daughter coming down for her dead, for many brave spirits have passed of wounds and more of fever along that track from Camargo to Monterey, and many more will die as they storm the Mexican citadel ere they plant the American flag on the Bishop's palace.

With this letter which she addresses to Alexander Martin, and with another that bears the name of Sharpe Hampton, the young lady comes out of the little adobe house and wanders to the fandango, which is still in progress, though the torches are burning more dimly. Here she finds a dashing young officer of May's Dragoons to whom she says: "Lieutenant Pelham."

And he, looking at her, whispers: "Miss Godfrey, how can I serve you?" and raises his hat, though courteously, quite formally, for already this young man knows that there is no hope for him of the fair girl's love.

"In case there is any accident to me, would you kindly deliver this letter to Captain Hampton? You, I think, owe it to me for the wild words you spoke to him that evening in Corpus Christi that kept his tongue silent too long. Of course, you know we are affianced?"

"Yes," mutters the dragoon. "I know that, and for my impulsive words I will deliver this letter to Captain Hampton if I die doing it. But you spoke—of—of some accident to you. There is some danger here, of course, to every one. Have you anything particular to fear?"

"No, except that I shall be without escort. Tomorrow I journey by a quicker way than your column would take."

"That must not be!" cries Pelham, earnestly. "That must not be!"

"I've got to go. I have got to find Sharpe before the next fight!" answers Estrella, frantically. "Every minute from him is danger to him. I've got to tell my affianced there is no reason for his leaving me, who was to be his bride within forty-eight hours, leaving me almost at the church door!"

"He thinks you untrue to him?" gasps the dragoon in low, astounded voice.

"Thank God, not that! Sharpe thinks he has killed my father, when it was only a vile wretch impersonating him. Should you meet Sharpe Hampton, tell him he did the kindest deed man could do for woman in shooting down the false Jim Godfrey, who, pretending fatherhood, would have made my broken heart the

buttress of his safety against the world. Sharpe will understand. The story is too painful for me to tell in detail. Good-bye. Thank you for your promise."

Miss Godfrey goes quietly away, and, finding the company's quartermaster-sergeant, delivers to him for transportation her letter to Martin, and also a short note, requesting him to hand it to Private Harry Love at reveille.

Whereupon early this morning, long before day-break, a strange cavalcade gets in motion. It consists of Florito's troupe of travelling performers. Among them rides Estrella Godfrey, looking not so unlike Carmelita, being dressed in the riding costume usual to Mexican girls.

In front of her travels the one-legged clown, who has now become two-legged, straddling his horse with the grace of a vacquero. The boy who threw somersaults the evening before is an equally good equestrian, and leads a couple of pack mules laden with the performing costumes and the impedimenta of the party.

So they take their way out of the little Mexican village, passing the American sentries, to whom Florito delivers a pass signed by the commanding officer; though the showman seems to be known quite well to the outposts, one of them saying: "That was a mighty good show you gave us last night. But, by Pike County, ye didn't trot out both of yer dancing girls!" He glances towards Miss Godfrey, who is heavily veiled with her *rebozo tapado*.

"Yes, my debutante," chuckles Florito. "She dances for the first time at the next pueblo."

Then they take their way up a trail leading by a rushing brook that comes foaming from the Sierras, behind which the moon is now sinking, its last rays illumining heavy chaparral of cacti, Spanish daggers, mesquites

and prickly pears, though higher up among the hills are pines and firs.

With every step of Mulefoot along this rocky path Miss Godfrey thinks, excitedly: "I am getting nearer to my love!"

But Florito, as he rides, the last of the party, grins to himself: "*Diablo*, a grand ransom and likewise a grand revenge. The affianced wife of the Ranger Captain who quirted me publicly on the plaza of Matamoras. *Por Dios*, and she, my prey, whom I will make my peon, and coin her charms into money till I let her ransom herself and make me rich!"

As for Carmelita, perhaps she has some conscience—for once or twice, riding by the side of her beautiful fellow peon, she has opened her lips impulsively, as if to say some words of warning, but each time the very loveliness of her exquisite American rival has made her snap her pearly teeth together like a vicious peccary.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WAIF OF THE BORDER.

From Monterey, the capital of Nueva Leon, now beleaguered by General Taylor's Army, extends a mountain valley running something over forty miles to a little southwest of the town of Saltillo. A long upland plateau, varying in width from a few hundred yards to four or five miles, it is quite well cultivated for Mexico, having a number of cornfields watered by the San Juan River, which gradually towards the south diminishes into a little stream. On both sides it is bordered by the almost impassable mountains

of the Sierra Madre, most of the escarpments of which are very steep.

Up this valley passes the main and only road capable of the transportation of artillery or the necessary impedimenta of an army marching from Monterey south to attack San Luis Potosi, en route for the City of Mexico. But a cut-off, a narrow mule path leaving the immediate rear of Monterey, leads through the high mountains, and after a number of miles of rocky trail over commanding heights and dizzy precipices reënters the Saltillo Valley. Monterey being now surrounded by the American Army, Worth's Division having got in the rear of it and cut its garrison off from the main road, this rocky defile is the only path open for passage of infantry or light cavalry reinforcements to the garrison of the beleaguered city, though utterly impassable to artillery or heavily accoutred men.

Into this trail leads the little mountain path over which Florito and his party escorting Miss Godfrey, journeying through the hills from the east, descend upon the third day after the night of the fandango. Florito thinks it is far from the highways of troops, as he has no wish to surrender this valuable young lady he is luring into captivity to rancheros. Under his guidance they have gone at first towards Montemorelos, then have turned west through the hills which gradually have become higher. Finally passing the divide, they have spent two nights at little mountain ranchos and are now descending into the main Saltillo Valley, nearly a score of miles southwest of Monterey.

At the junction of these two trails, just out of the big valley, is a little pueblo nestled in the hills and well sheltered among woods of mountain timber. From it, running down into the main plateau, the path is wider and less precipitous, and might even permit the passage of a well-horsed light field piece, though the gorge

leading to the mountains is impracticable to any but horsemen or footmen.

As Miss Godfrey in company with Florito and his party rides into this little Mexican town towards evening she scarce notices the place itself, which seems very quiet and peaceful, though from the northeast comes a low, faint, very distant rumbling, which she thinks is thunder; though it is the roar of cannon telling of dying brave men around the distant walls of assaulted Monterey.

All the young lady's eyes show her is that there is a long, narrow defile leading through the great mountains to the north, and into this descends the smaller mule path that she has travelled. That beyond this, almost where the gorge debouches upon the plateau, is a little town of adobes containing the ordinary plaza upon one side of which is the usual Mexican church built of stone, with its little peculiar shaped belfry. Opposite this, on the other side of the plaza, stands a half-ruined monastery; about it cactus-covered walls also of stone, in which are visible the orange trees, flowers and grape vines of a deserted garden. This religious house has probably been abandoned by its monks from the time of the Mexican War of Independence.

Slightly nearer to them is a lower building, presumably once a convent for women. It adjoins the monastery, yet fronts another side of the plaza. Over all this, lighting the gorge and making red the Saltillo Valley beyond, is the great tropic sun sinking behind the higher peaks of the Sierra Madre.

But in the red glow that illumines the unpaved streets, though her eyes seek for them hungrily as those of a traveller on the desert looking for an oasis, she notes no Texan Rangers. As their little cavalcade comes jingling into it she can see only a few *rurales*

of the nearby valley, a lot of cigarette-smoking *mozos* and *leperos*, and a few gaudily skirted *poblanas*, who lounge about in their free Mexican style, though this evening the very distant thunderstorm to the north seems to put some excitement into them.

These crowd about the little party as Florito halts his *caballada* in front of the deserted convent, whose adobe walls are quite thick, having grated windows and an unusually strong *reja* fixed on its heavily studded street door, though the iron work is rendered weak by the rust of generations. This ruined convent Florito's party take possession of with scant ceremony, their chief hurrying off in his active Latin way to plant his banner in the plaza and see the *alcalde* as to arrangements for the coming exhibition.

Here in a big room with grated windows opening upon the plaza Carmelita says: "Behold our quarters!" and prepares to make herself comfortable, laughing as Estrella shudders at the *alacrans*, centipedes and scorpions that they find wandering about its corners and crevices. "Do with them as I do!" she cries, vivaciously, as she crushes an *alacran* under her little foot.

But even these reptiles affect Miss Godfrey's mind only passingly. She has sunk upon a pile of blankets they have tossed down for her on the mud floor, and is thinking only of meeting Hampton, which now seems to her almost suspiciously delayed. After a little she watches lazily, for she is quite tired, the hastily lighted fire and the tortillas being made upon a hot stone by a girl who seems to be the maid of all work of the party, and who sold *mesca!* and refreshments at Florito's *fandango* four evenings before, likewise the *olla podrida* which is being cooked in an iron pot, plenty of chili-colorado being tossed into it with sufficient of garlic to make her open her nostrils. During

this the American girl runs over in her mind rather dreamily the incidents of her strange journey, which through the mountains has been quite coolly pleasant compared with that of the hot roads over the lower plains.

During her travels she has received complaisant attention from her fellow travellers and much encouragement from little Florito, who, as he has ridden beside her, has whispered to her every now and then: "*Vamos, il Capitan Hampton is ahead of us.*"

To this she has said: "You seem to know his company's movements very well."

And the little scoundrel, being anxious to keep up her resolution and incite her to rapid riding, has disclosed to her rather incautiously, though he is far away from Mexican lancers, that he has been at times a spy for the Americanos, and thus knows Hampton's probable location. "I have been with the Texan Captain on and off this month, so has Carmelita," he says between puffs of his cigarette. "We have been valuable to him in—oh, you understand—information. Carmelita and I could go into Monterey unquestioned."

"You have been with Captain Hampton, and she has been with Captain Hampton for the last month," mutters Miss Godfrey, and looks with uneasy eyes at the beauty of the dancing girl who is riding in her graceful Mexican style near the head of the party.

"*Cierto.* Carmelita is quite the right hand of the American Captain. She would do anything for him. You understand, quite the right hand?"

"Ah, yes, I believe I understand," sighs Estrella, though she cannot believe his words. Yet once or twice in the last day or two, thinking of this, she has said to herself: "Why should I try to see him? If Sharpe really loved me, he could not——" then shuddered: "Why not! He thinks a father's blood stands

between us and I am lost to him forever!" This has affected her spirits as she has ridden over the steep mountain passes, the sure hoofs of Mulefoot carrying her safely across the dizzy trail. Several times she has cried mentally: "It is a duty! Under the circumstances, I will tell this man!" then has tearfully faltered: "If he has no hope of me, what may he not have carelessly done? May he not have tried to forget me in——" She cannot continue the cruel thought. She simply wrings her hands and begins to hate Carmelita as thoroughly as Carmelita hates her.

As for Carmelita, several times during this curious journey she has looked upon her lovely companion when they have got to chatting together—as girls will do, even if they hate each other—with strange spasms of conscience in her eyes. Once she and Florito have had a very angry discussion, the little showman bandit raising his quirta to the dancing girl, and she putting her little hand upon the stiletto in her bosom, has muttered, snarlingly: "The time has passed for that. *Caramba*, a blow and you are dead!" Then she has laughed jeeringly: "There are tenderer shoulders than mine. Beat your other slave!"

But Miss Godfrey doesn't know the covert suggestion of Carmelita's words, and journeys unsuspectingly along. For all through this curious ride, even after the days have passed in which Florito has promised she should encounter the Texan Ranger, she has had but little thought of her own personal peril. She has grown so accustomed to thinking of Hampton's danger that her own risk seldom rises in her mind. Besides, she feels quite confident of her own powers of self-defence. Has she not the Ranger's two five-shooters at her belt, and does she not know how to use these arms with precision and effect!

Perchance she wouldn't be as confident of their value

did she remember that at the last halt, where she had unbuckled for her convenience the belt that carries the heavy weapons and put them by her side, that Carmelita has attracted her attention by taking her to see some wild flowers growing in a rocky nook, lovely orchids that are found very beautiful in Mexico; that when she has returned from this, only a few steps away in a little neighboring gorge, Florito's manner has been much easier, and he has chuckled right merrily to himself as she has buckled on the belt containing her weapons.

This retrospection is interrupted by the return of Florito, who says, contentedly: "Carmelita, I've seen the *alcalde*. We perform this evening in the little plaza."

But Miss Godfrey, starting up, asks him: "Any news of the Spy Company?"

"No, no news of the rangers," he grins, "but we are going towards them—to-morrow," he waves his hand towards the west.

But Florito's only intention is to get as far as possible from the rangers and, in fact, he doesn't care to be bothered by Mexican *rancheros*. They might take his valuable captive from him. In his mind is the pleasing thought: "To-morrow we will cross the valley and enter the main range. A few days from now we will be in their fastnesses, well away from contending armies, where I can make this *rica* girl write such tearful letters that they will send for her delivery whole mule-loads of silver. *Diablo*, then I will become a *rico* myself!"

So over their supper he gets to chatting quite merrily, saying to Carmelita, who has already put herself into dancing *toilet*: "*Santos*, you're pretty enough to make a saint want to kiss you," and, chucking her under the chin, would perhaps place a salute upon the

dewy cherries she calls lips; but she steps back, and, raising quick as lightning a stiletto, utters this astounding sentiment for a woman: "Florito, dare to tell me I am beautiful again and I'll kill you. My lips are only for one man!"

"Who never kisses them!" sneers the acute little scoundrel.

At this cruel scoff Carmelita looks at him with agonized face, then throws up her hands and gasps: "Ay de mi!" and sinks down upon a pile of blankets, crying as if her heart would break, while the volatile little showman goes chucklingly away to engage pine torches to illuminate this evening's exhibition in the plaza.

Looking upon this, a curious thought enters Miss Godfrey: "For whom does she keep her lips? Hampton; who never kisses them!" and for every sob of Carmelita there is a rapturous hope in the American girl's heart.

Quite shortly afterwards, hope is changed to terror. Florito flies in excitedly and cries: "*Santos*, you see them!"

"What, the Spy Company?" ejaculates Miss Godfrey, starting up wildly.

"No, *maldito*, the accursed lancers of Canales! See, they are coming up the defile from the Saltillo road!"

Looking through the grated windows Miss Godfrey notices in the dusk a column of rough-riding lancers, the colors of their little green, white and red Mexican flag, its centre emblazoned by an Aztec eagle, being apparent in the light of the torches flaming for Florito's exhibition in the plaza.

To the little showman's rage, these fellows, some hundred of them, make their preparations for the night, putting out a picket further up the cañon and lighting fires in the plaza; the bulk of the men occupying the

church, and their officers going off to the alcalde's house for their supper.

Peering out at them, Miss Godfrey thinks: "These are the men from whom Hampton rescued me by putting the Comanches on them five months ago. And in all this time the man I love and I have had but one— one blessed interview in which we told our passion to the other. And now, when I had hoped to see his dashing Rangers, these ruffians again cut me off from him. Fate is against me!"

Fate seems also to be against Florito; he is not very eager for the lancers of Canales. "The beasts will give me next to nothing!" he snarls, "and they'll want everything; every dance; every contortion; every performer among us." Then he cries suddenly to Miss Godfrey: "Keep your head from the window, girl!" next mutters, affrightedly: "*Diablo*, you will have to appear *now!*"

"I?" This is a half-scream from the American girl.

"Yes, the *mozos* are chattering of my *two* dancing girls. I mentioned you in my troupe to the alcalde. For your own safety, you will have to be a *figurante*. Otherwise the officers of these devil lancers, if they guess, will demand you as their prisoner, and then, *santos y muertos*, what will happen to you!"

"I—I, a dancing girl?" stammers Estrella, getting red to the roots of her hair.

"*Cierto*, why not? You can dance?"

"Oh, yes, but only ballroom steps."

"*Caspita*, that's the idea. Ballroom steps. A novelty. La Polka is now the favorite dance of Mexico. Polka high. Kick your feet in air. Polka after the Parisian manner! Carmelita, make her look like you!" and he goes away, leaving Miss Godfrey trembling and confused.

As for Carmelita, a kind of nasty triumph is in her

eyes. She is thinking: "Hampton turned up his nose at me, the dancing girl. *Bueno*, she will be no better than I am. And then her beauty and Canales's officers—*Madre de Dios*, it is a devilish thing I am doing!" But she goes with eager hands making Estrella like herself, chatting laughingly: "You will never be discovered. Bah, some yellow clay and some wild cherry juice upon those pretty white legs of yours, and they'll be as brown as mine. My skin's as white as yours. Your face is as tanned as mine now. It is only sunshine," and Carmelita pulls her chemise from her shoulders, showing them as beautifully formed and as dazzlingly white where protected from the sun as even those of the fair American. "*Jesus*, dressed like me, floating rebozo on your head, comb and castanets. *Vaya*, you're a dancing girl."

During this she has been getting the American girl into a costume like unto hers that she pulls from one of the saddle bags. In this, though unaided, she has not been resisted by Miss Godfrey, for in her agitation Estrella doesn't know exactly what to do. She is thinking of Canales's awful lancers. In her ears is ringing Florito's terrible insinuation: "And then, *santos y muertos*, what will happen to you!"

In a state of modest coma Miss Godfrey permits Carmelita to unbind her hair and do it up in the floating Spanish fashion, with comb and lace rebozo floating from it, and allows even her shoulders to be stained with the wild cherry juice, which Manola, the girl attendant, has brought in.

Though glancing down upon herself now in the dancing-girl's costume, she knows she could easier die than pose in its semi-nudity of limbs and bosom, before the crowd gathering in the plaza.

Mistaking the repugnance on Estrella's face, Carmelita says reassuringly: "Idiot, don't be frightened.

You look well enough. *Verdad*, you've got the finest shape in all Mexico!" Putting a blazing torch before a cracked mirror that she uses during personal adornment, she places her arm about Estrella's waist, and half pulls the American girl to it. "Here, look in the glass!" she laughs, then ejaculates in a dazed way: "*Santissima Virgen*, we're as like as two cherries."

Miss Godfrey carelessly gazing into the mirror starts astounded; for face by face, the heads of both girls, crowned with Spanish combs and floating lace scarfs, their hair unbound and mixed together, their delicate shoulders and bosoms side by side rising from the snowy chemises, they look like copies of the same painting.

Though Carmelita's figure is a little slenderer, and her eyes and hair are slightly darker, the features of both have the same cast, their eyes the same expression, their faces the most striking resemblance of family and blood.

"*Jesus*, we're as like as two sisters!" laughs Carmelita.

"Like as two *sisters*!" cries Estrella, looking at the mirror as if fascinated. "Like as two SISTERS?" She ponders a moment and then asks eagerly: "You—you told me you were the waif of the border. Who are your father and mother?"

"Devil knows," jeers Carmelita. "Apparently they looked like your father and mother."

"Did I not tell you once I had a sister stolen? Your age?" asks Estrella, her voice tender but anxious.

"*Quien sabe?* The sisters at Chihuahua got me when I must have been about four. They called me twelve when I left them. I—I'm eighteen now. But why are you bothering with these questions? Let me get you ready for la Polka!"

"You remember nothing of your past? No memory floats to you?" goes on Miss Godfrey, unheeding.

"Yes, my first recollection was a kick of a mule, and my second a crack from a quirta, and my—but don't you dare cry for me. I'm tough as rawhide! Besides I had a bauble once, a little circle. It was of gold, so I lost it at monte; bet it against a silver dollar."

"A circle like mine!" cries Estrella.

"Yes; did you win it from the monte man? Besides, there was a word."

"The word you remember!"

"Oh, it was—it wasn't even *Americano*. Sounded like the priests' Latin. Guess I must have heard it at mass."

"What was it?"

"Well, it was—some name or something. What are you asking me these questions for? *Caramba*, what are you excited about? Here's the cherry juice! Let me make those white legs as brown as mine."

"Think, think; please think!" cries Estrella. "Nothing till you think!"

"Well, it was See-bill!" Then Carmelita snarls angrily: "Curse you, don't kiss me!"

For the other has got her arm about her and is half crying, half whispering: "Sybil! I believe you're my sister."

"Ah, don't try that dodge on me to get my sympathy," scoffs Carmelita, pulling herself away. "If you were my sister, do you suppose I could stand by and see you——" She snaps her pearly teeth together and goes away murmuring in a shame-faced manner: "Sister—sister! That would be bad luck! Sister—*Santissima Virgen*, then I couldn't hate her!" Still, this consideration seems to have some weight on the dancing girl's mind.

Quite shortly after, Florito coming in crying:

"Canales and his officers are all ready for the show," and asking eagerly: "Let me look at my debutante." Carmelita, drawing him aside, whispers: "Impossible to display her. Look at her trying to hide herself from you. That extraordinary attribute the *Americanas* call shame would betray her. Canales must not guess you have a Yankee with you. You have been going too much lately with *Americanos* for your own safety. If they suspected you had been a Yankee spy, poor little Florito would be stood against that church wall and filled as full of escopeta balls as pigs are with stuffing."

"*Santos y demonios*, I believe you're right," shudders the little fellow, with white lips. Hastily throwing a sarape over Miss Godfrey, he whispers: "Keep close here, girl, for your own life. Don't burn any lights. Carmelita shall dance in your place, and I will, if questioned, say you are ill of the fever or the vomito. That will keep them away!"

But Carmelita, gazing on him, mutters excitedly to herself: "What devilish thing has Florito in his eyes? When Florito blinks, look out for him. *Santa Maria*, he has blinked four times!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SPY COMPANY.

So the two leave Estrella in the dark, bat-haunted, insect-crawling place. She hears Carmelita's light voice die away in the distance, likewise the exclamations of the clown, who has become again one-legged, and the acrobatic boy as they go out to performance. Then after a time from the plaza float in the shouts

and "Buenos!" of the crowd as the performance seems to go merrily along.

Though the illumination of the torches in the plaza puts a dull radiance into portions of the room, Miss Godfrey doesn't look out or heed this very much. She is meditating of the sister she has claimed; and her heart becomes tender to the waif of the frontier. She sighs, thinking of the uncared for child tossed helpless among the rough men of the border, Mexicans, Yankees and half-breeds, whose diversion Carmelita must have been at fandangos and fairs; whose badinage, applause and admiration the dancing girl had been compelled to accept as part of her very business, controlled by a master who cares for nothing but dollars. By this time, Estrella gauges Florito's character very well, though there is a crafty zenith of villainy in the little fellow that later will make her blood run very cold in her veins.

Then, under the martial sounds without, for they are changing sentries, her mind drifts to the man she loves, but scarce hopes to see again. Thinking of Hampton, she shudders at Canales.

About this time, Miss Godfrey can hear horse's hoofs coming at a gallop along the mountain trail from the north towards Monterey, and every now and then the dull, distant thunder seems to float through the mountain pass, though it never gets nearer and there is no lightning.

Then there are fiercer cries and great excitement from without; and the listening girl hears horse's hoofs again, though these go rapidly down into the main valley. But the hasty words of two men passing along the side of the plaza by her grated window tell her that the booming of distant thunder to the north is the American attack on Monterey: likewise that for

some unknown reason reinforcements have been sent for by Canales.

Hearing this, Estrella wrings her hands and cries out in despair: "Florito again promised that to-morrow I should meet Hampton and his dashing Rangers, and now more of these ruffian lancers to make escape impossible."

So it goes along in her mind; Carmelita! Hampton! Canales! each bringing misery to her, till almost morning, the revelry being still kept up outside, as these aguardiente-drinking rancheros are not troops under regular discipline.

As daylight comes into the great room through its big barred openings, danger imminent and degrading confronts the watching girl. Carmelita enters hastily and goes nervously about exchanging her dancing costume for the riding dress in which she travels. Then she lights a cigarette and as she puffs it communes with herself as if trying to fight down a rising conscience. "A courier has come from the north. Canales has sent to Muertos for reinforcements. A colonel of cavalry may head them. Before his commanding officer arrives, Canales will take action." She walks up to Estrella and mutters: "*Jesus*, why have you made me a devil? Why have you loved the man I love? Why have you made his face cold to me? Why have you caused him to turn from my proffered lips?"

"A dancing girl's lips are proffered to too many," says Miss Godfrey, rising haughtily. Agony and despair have embittered her tongue.

"Oh, yes, a dancing girl, but still like you, cold Northern creature, immaculate. *Caramba*, don't turn from me as if I were contaminated—immaculate as you! I was a child when I first saw the handsome Captain and loved him, as he kept me from a beating—a child! Since that time I have held my lips for him

as surely, as safely, as you, cold Northern beauty, have preserved your lips. It's easy to be virtuous when one loves but one man and—and he won't love you." Then she cries petulantly: "Stop kissing me!"

For Estrella has got Carmelita in her arms and is caressing and sobbing over her, and blessing her because Sharpe Hampton has not succumbed to her witcheries and allurements.

"Oh, you needn't thank me—thank him. When Sharpe has lain out on the open plain at night, when Florito and I had been engaged in going through the Mexican lines and bringing him information, I have crawled to him—to kiss him; and in his sleep he has murmured your name. Oh, I could have driven knife through him or through myself. That's why I have kept from him your——" Carmelita snaps her teeth together, but hangs her head in shame-faced way. "That's why you're here about to be——" She pauses again and cries: "No, no! You have called me sister; I must save you from that!" and hastily throws a cloak over Estrella.

"Save me from what?"

"Florito! That little villain must sacrifice you to save his beastly life. Made arrogant by aguardiente, he foolishly showed the gold you had given him and what he had picked up by other efforts, some of it from the man you love. Canales always wants all the gold he sees. The guerrilla officer had heard reports that Florito had been agent for *los Yankees*; so they will shoot Florito for a spy if they spare not his life for some big ransom: Florito knows that, and his big ransom will be you—your charms and beauty."

"Me!" shrieks Estrella, springing up, and passes to the door as if to try to fly, but Carmelita puts detaining arm upon her, and mutters sadly: "Too late."

For staggering in, is little Florito, his cunning face

very pale, his snake-like eyes excited, his lithe limbs trembling. A burning torch is in his hand, as if he feared Estrella might conceal herself. This he sticks into the mud floor of the room, murmuring apologetically, half to himself, half to his victim: "There is nothing for it. Canales, if I give you to him, will after"—his tongue seems ashamed to utter the devilish thought—"after a time permit you to be ransomed. That money the guerrilla officer will divide with me. But otherwise—he accuses me of horrible things—me a Mexican patriot! He hints I am a Yankee spy, and threatens a court-martial. A drumhead don't take ten minutes." Suddenly the little chap listens and gasps, tremblingly: "*Dios*, I can hear the guard loading their arms now!" To this he adds in devilish yet faltering philosophy: "Man, when his life is in danger, must do everything to protect it. It is his duty, you see, *Senorita Godfrey*, his duty."

For Estrella has thrown herself upon her knees and is pleading: "For God's sake, don't—don't give me over to Canales." But seeing he still moves towards the door, the American girl suddenly springs up, commands hoarsely: "You shall not!" and drawing her revolver, sights him by the torchlight. To Carmelita she calls: "Bar that door!" and to the showman says sternly: "Move an inch to tell them you have me captive here, and it is your last step!" The pistol is leveled very straight and doesn't tremble.

But the little fellow, with a mocking laugh, still moves from her.

"Then God forgive you and forgive me!" mutters the brave girl, and shoots to kill.

But the lock on her revolver only snaps. She turns the cylinder again, and aiming very straight, pulls the trigger once more, but no report answers the sharp click of the lock. To her jeers Florito: "You forget

you've left your pistols aside when Carmelita took you to see the wild flowers in the glen."

"Oh, you conscienceless wretch!" cries Estrella, turning in despairing reproach upon the dancing girl. "You, whom I once called sister, you!" Then she falters: "Deserted!" for Carmelita, with a muttered "Forgive me!" has run out of the door, and Florito has darted after her and is now bolting the door upon the outside.

The girl hears the bars coming down one after the other, then the click of a rusty lock, though the dastard calls through in guarded voice: "Courage, I want all your ransom. I shall not give you up till I am looking at the guns of the firing party. *Dios de me Madre*, I am a man of honor!"

Fortunately in this moment of despair, Estrella Godfrey's pistols are unfireable, else she would kill herself and thus make sure Canales never will put his paws upon her. But now the very helplessness of her situation forces her to inertness. Gazing about the big, empty, mud-floored room into which she has been locked, the girl feels sure its doors will never open except for her delivery to the bandit chieftain. She looks at her nude white limbs and uncovered shoulders and shudders: "I will not be dragged out in this shameless garb," and hurriedly throws off the light costume of the dancing girl and contrives to put herself once more in the Indian riding dress she had worn.

During this, she has once or twice, attracted by noises in the plaza, looked out with staring eyes. By the increasing morning light, she has seen apparently a drumhead court-martial of three or four officers gathered together outside the church. It is scarce three hundred feet away. Before them she recognizes Florito. She knows he will not tell of her until his last chance is gone. She is too valuable to share her ransom with another.

But now what passes before her swimming eyes makes her shiver as if she had the ague. She sees the firing party being drawn up. Florito is about to be dragged to the fatal wall. With wild gesticulation he has beckoned imploringly Canales apart and talked hurriedly to him, and that guerrilla chief, with long, black moustache, dark, ferocious, merciless eyes, is laughing and looking at her place of imprisonment, and giving some hurried orders. But just here a mounted man, coming down the trail from the north, hurries into the plaza, and draws the scoundrel's attention from her by crying out: "*Americanos!*"

The laugh and triumph stop on the guerrilla chief's face.

Estrella sees his officers hurriedly marshaling all his men. "Surely to seize a poor girl, they wouldn't need so many," she thinks, and noting Canales point up the canon, she follows his motion and gives a gasp of crazy joy.

Coming down from the north along the trail are a company of mounted men. By their garb and armament, she knows they are Rangers, and looking with all her eyes, can't believe them. Her limbs tremble as the fear of death is lifted from them. She whispers: "The Spy Company!" then cries: "Sharpe Hampton! He's here. I am saved." To herself she laughs: "Canales's men are gliding away. They have no wish for battle with even these few *Americanos*." Then pauses horrified in her triumph, for she notes the Mexicans are preparing an ambuscade, some fifty of them going quietly with their escopetas into the church that the Texans must ride past. The rest are hurriedly mounting and arraying themselves. She sees under the mists of the morning a cloud of dust very distant coming up the broad Saltillo valley. She remembers Carmelita's words, and mutters to herself, with white lips: "Re-

inforcements from Muertos. It is an ambush! Hampton, pursuing the cavalry, will ride into the deadly fusillade from the church. I must warn him."

She would lift up her voice and scream out, but knows the Texans are too far distant: "A few cries won't frighten Sharpe Hampton," she thinks; then suddenly grows very pale. For by the rising sun she sees from each house and even from the church itself the *mozos* and *poblanos* of the town are waving white flags and handkerchiefs, and shudders: "Flags of truce to kill the man I love!"* In her excited anguish, she attacks the door with her little feet and hands as if she would break it down and run out to warn him.

Then, seeing oak planks are too strong for her fragile strength, she ceases bruising her flesh against them and for Sharpe Hampton's sake forces herself to become cool and think with all her might.

Suddenly she takes the cylinder from her revolver and examines it. A second later she cries joyously: "Florito only spoiled the caps!" and goes to refilling the nipples with powder and from a little pouch in her belt recaps the weapon.

Running to the window, white flags are floating everywhere; no signs of ambush from the church, and Canales heading his squadron, is apparently retreating down the defile to lure the Texans on.

Putting the revolver up through the grating of the window, Estrella fires two shots into the air in quick succession, and finds it gives the Texans warning.

The little command of some thirty Rangers, that have been coming down the trail cautiously, though

* This same stratagem was employed by the Mexicans at the Battle of Huamantla, a year afterward. By it Captain Sam H. Walker of the Rifles was slain, sacrificing his life to save his company in so heroic a manner that his death thrilled the whole United States.—*Editor.*

they have quickened their pace at seeing the flags of truce thrown not only from the ordinary dwellings of the town, but from the church itself, suddenly pause at the pistol shots.

She sees Hampton hastily knock up two or three rifles that are leveled towards the opening from which she fired, and whispers to herself: "Thank God; they know it is a friend." Then noting that the Texans after reconnoitering and discovering Canales' mounted lancers at the other end of the street, turn their horses' heads and ride back in seeming flight up the cañon, she wrings her hands in anguish and moans: "They are retreating. I have saved Sharpe, but taken the last hope from myself." Though she can hardly believe her eyes, and, remembering Carmelita's description of the dread nature of this command, sneers: "For men who want to die, this Spy Company seem to take very good care of their lives."

At this moment, seeing the backs of the Rangers, the lancers who are on horseback, headed by Canales himself, can no longer hold themselves. With shouts of rage and cries of victory, in their excited Mexican way, they spur past the church and up the canon after the retreating Texans and *nearly* reach them. Then in a flash all is changed. The Texans wheel quick as terriers whose tails are grabbed, and meet the lancers with shots from deadly revolvers so coolly discharged that almost to each report a ranchero falls off his horse.

"Oh, merciful Heaven, they killed nearly twenty at the first fire; oh, those murderous pistols!" screams the excited girl. "Ah, they're all coming this way together." For, with pistol shots ringing out, the Spy Company is now in the very midst of the lancers, the whole concourse coming into the town in hideous medley, dying men falling from their horses at every jump. Estrella nearly laughs as she sees the boy lieutenant

called "The Bravo," coolly smoking a cigarette, dodge under a rancho's lance and shoot him down like lightning.

So they come past the captive's window, into the plaza, in front of the church from which the Mexicans in ambuscade dare not shoot, being as liable to hit friend as foe. Then, Estrella gives another elated scream, for though shooting and fighting to its very gates, as the Texans reach the stone-walled convent-garden, they swing off and ride in. Here, springing off their horses, they man the cactus-covered wall and pelt with rifle-shots the Mexicans in the church opposite.

"Oh, what a lovely ruse!" yells the girl, and, dancing about with excitement, careless of shots, some of which have lodged quite near to her, continues her comment: "They have hardly lost a man, and now with their rifles against escopetas, will soon make those in the church throw up their hands and wave real flags of truce. It is the last of Canales. Sharpe killed him."

For she has seen the guerrilla chief fall from his horse to Hampton's pistol as the Ranger wheeled into the convent garden.

Then another look comes into Estrella's eyes. Though this tender creature has no pity for the man who would have made her his prey, the bodies of two or three Texans lying down the road stabbed to death with lances, make her wring her hands.

But the girl has little time for sympathy. Her eyes are too much engrossed with the combat that goes on about her, at its opening, quite in favor of the Americans, whose deadly rifle-balls search each orifice and window in the church opposite to them, slaughtering the rancho's, who fire upon them. So the thing goes on for an hour. Then the Texan fire grows more deliberate; apparently they don't care to use a great deal

of ammunition. She wonders if it is to make preparation for the regiment of lancers she can see coming up the Saltillo plain, with them a light field-piece heavily horsed.

"Sharpe must be warned to retreat," she thinks, "before numbers overwhelm him!" and would go forth through the hailstorm of bullets in the plaza to give him information; but the strong oak door locked and barred by Florito makes this impossible.

She knows its strength too well to attack it. Into her mind, made active by excitement, flashes: "There may be some other way!"

She goes looking about the great apartment, which up to this time, she had only carelessly inspected, being kept from its distant portions by its wandering alacrans and centipedes. Its recesses are dark, but re-lighting the torch Florito has left behind him, she makes a hasty search.

Finally discovering a little portal unfastened, which apparently leads to the rest of the building, she opens it and goes groping by torchlight through the dark passageways and cells of the old convent, disturbing now and again a snake that rustles from her. All the time the faint reports of musketry and rifles outside show the fight is going on. In other days she would have gone shuddering, crouching, trembling through the gloomy route; now she strides with revolver in one fair hand and torch in the other.

Finally she finds to her eager searching a passageway, leading first into a little chapel, then into the convent once used by the old priests. The din outside of this is terrific, showing that she is close to the combat. Issuing very cautiously from this, she crouches down behind a stone balustrade, looking from a low terrace, despite musket-balls and escopeta slugs that whistle about her, upon an awful sight.

The day is a bright tropic one. The hot sun shines down through a little heat haze upon the church across the square, shrouded in the smoke of its musketry. In the foreground are the orange trees, plants and flowers of the priests' garden, their leaves dropping and their twigs and branches falling to the earth, cut away by pelting musketry. Just in front of these, manning the cactus-covered wall of stone, are the Spy Company, marketing their reckless lives at a very stiff price in Mexican blood. Wounded and unwounded, the slender line of rangers defend this wall against tremendous odds, for already some of the Mexican reinforcements have arrived from Muertos. Two or three dead bodies lie in the orange trees of the garden and a dying gambler, lying beside them, desperately maimed, is deliriously shrieking out: "Copper the ace!" The rest are all at their posts, and one, a youth, whose head is swathed with bloody bandage, and whose pale face and ashen lips foretell coming death, not strong enough to stand, is half leaning on a couple of saddles and firing his rifle slowly and accurately, doing his duty till he dies.

Another, an old, hard-featured scout of the frontier, is patting him on the back and pouring down the dying boy's white lips the last drop of water from his canteen, and laughing: "Bully, little Johnny, that was a great shot of yours. That swatted a Greaser sergeant."

Further down the line she hears a Saxon voice shouting of mounting guard in St. James's Palace, and looking, sees the English lieutenant who Carmelita said was a lord, with a great big wound in his breast, propped up and shooting his rifle, but between shots raving of the Royal Horse Guards Blue, and lords and honorables and dukes and duchesses.

Behind this line is a sunny-haired boy she recognizes as "The Bravo" from Carmelita's description. He is

walking up and down, coolly smoking his cigarette, though he has a cocked revolver in his other hand, now and then giving orders to the rangers, and selecting places for them to direct their fire.

But even this doesn't impress the girl so much as the figure of Sharpe Hampton, who is just springing on horse ready to dart out into the hail of bullets. Though noting the awful danger to him, the little Bravo has stepped up, and between puffs of his cigarette has called: "Sharpe, don't try it. The boys can't spare you this trip!"

To him Hampton says: "I have got to. We're at the very last cartridge. The ammunition mule lies dead three hundred yards up the street. I have got to. How's Harrowly?" He nods towards the English lieutenant.

"Going. He's raving of Hyde Park and he's got into the aristocracy. He's fighting just the same, gritty but going."

"Then, when I'm away, you're in command. Remember Worth's orders are to hold this pass so that no cavalry and light troops get behind him while he's attacking the Loma and the Bishop's Palace. Hold it till——"

"Till I stop smoking cigarettes," laughs the boy.

"That will be long enough," answers Hampton. "Now, tell the boys to keep down the Greasers' fire till I get round the corner of the plaza."

Miss Godfrey is about to cry out to him, but just then a man falls dead from the wall just in front of her, and before her pale lips can frame an outcry, Hampton, bending low in his saddle, dashes through the half-open gate. The Mexican musketry seems to give him heavy greeting. But a yell from one or two of the men further down the wall tells her Hampton has dis-

appeared round the corner of the plaza. Then she sinks down to pray for him.

Apparently her praying is not in vain, for distant screams of rage and "*Carambas!*" and "*Carajos!*" float from the church opposite, and the Mexican shooting is stronger than ever despite the faint replies of the almost cartridgeless Texans.

Then there is a yell, and though the bullets fly faster from the church, Hampton comes dashing in, springs off his dying horse, and throws two big leather bags down in the garden behind the wall, and says to the Bravo: "Close call! they shot my sombrero off and clipped one of my spurs."

Then the men come gradually down one or two at a time, to replenish their cartridge pouches, though a few old frontiersmen only take powder and ball, loading their rifles in the Kentucky way and using patched balls that go very straight.

During this, Estrella is trying to get down into the garden, but finds no outlet from the terrace. Once or twice she wildly calls her sweetheart's name. In the noise of battle the girl isn't heard. For now the Texans are intent upon a regiment of cavalry coming up from the valley; ahead of it a field-piece dragged by twenty horses up the steep path, and the Bravo has cried: "There's a gun coming around the corner, Sharpe."

"Then it must never be fired," is the terse reply. Estrella hears the orders quietly given, and a detail tolled off, each man in rotation, to shoot the first Mexican gunner putting lintstock to that cannon.

Almost as the words are spoken, there is the quick trample of hoofs, and the gun, dragged by twenty horses, rapidly enters the plaza and is placed in position, the Texans holding their fire.

But as they wheel the field-piece into position, there

is a noise as if a bunch of firecrackers was exploded from the wall, and Estrella sees half a dozen cannoneers go down, though one, apparently the sergeant of the section, takes up the lintstock; but to the crack of Hampton's rifle, he falls dead.

Another seizes the port fire, but a frontiersman shoots him down; he staggers from the gun and tumbles dying on the plaza. And so on, every man trying to fire that cannon dies, till all the gunners have been shot away. Then the Mexican officers desperately put in a detail of dismounted lancers to do the work, but none lives to reach the cannon; and it stands only attended by dead men.*

All this time the rest of the Texans are keeping down the fire from the church. They are not quite so many now. One lies moaning, with an escopeta ball through both shoulders; the boy who was mortally wounded and fighting on, has given a gasp and dropped his rifle; and the English lieutenant has screamed deliriously: "Charge! God save the Queen!" and fallen from the wall.

Of this Estrella has seen little; frantically trying to find entrance to the garden, she has left the terrace and is exploring the vaults underneath the chapel. Now discovering a little narrow portal, she has come crouching through the musketry-pelted orange trees of the garden and is within a few feet of Hampton.

Even as she raises her voice to call him, a shuddering dread palsies her tongue. The man she loves, remarking to the sunny-faced boy they call "The Bravo": "Hang it, they've got riatas around that gun. They must never get it into the shelter of the church!" pulls both revolvers from his belt, cocks them and runs out of the open gate into the hail of bullets on the plaza.

At this, even the little lieutenant, throwing his cigar-

* This happened also at Mier in 1842.—*Editor.*

ette away, mutters hopelessly: "That's certain death!"

Springing to the wall and clambering up a little embrasure in it, Estrella peers over and sees Hampton running straight at the six-pounder, that is surrounded by a new detail of men.

As he comes, half a hundred muskets from the church across the plaza are leveled at him. She shrieks "Sharpe, come back!" and frantically waves something she has plucked from her belt, beseeching him to return.

Then there are cries of astonishment from the Texans. Hampton has shot the gunners all about the cannon, and disabled the gun itself by firing up its vent. Not a Mexican hand has been raised against him as he comes running back.

But now from the church arise enough anathemas and curses to almost unsanctify it, and volley after volley of vengeful musketry.

But the Spy Company's fire is very deadly and makes the escopeta shots inaccurate. So Sharpe comes into the garden, as if he had a charmed life. Here he says shortly and sternly: "Boys, what dastard of you raised a flag of truce upon this wall and made me murder those six Mexican gunners?"

"Murder *Greasers?*" scream his men.

"Yes, not one of them defended himself. They thought we had surrendered. I saw the white rag as I hurried back!"

"Bedad, we'd no more wave a flag of truce than the devil would drink holy water," jeers an Irish ranger.

The Bravo simply says: "Not one of us, Captain, hoisted a white rag."

Then they all pause, astounded, for a sweet girl's voice from a cactus-screened part of the wall cries over the din: "I did."

Gazing at her, Hampton gasps: "Strella! Good

God! you here?" and reaching up, plucks her to a place of greater safety.

"I did!" says Miss Godfrey, stoutly. "The Mexicans this morning waved flags of truce to lure you into ambush. Turn about was fair play. I waved a white handkerchief to save your life."

CHAPTER XX.

CARMELITA'S RETURN.

With this, the rangers lining the wall near them yell with laughter, even as they fight, and one cries: "Waugh, did the Greasers up with thar own med'cine!" And another shouts: "She's clean grit, Sharpe!"

"Yes, I—I hope I am!" answers Estrella, radiant in the thought that she has saved, if but for a moment, the existence of the man she loves; adding to the inquiring and astounded faces turned to her: "I'm Sharpe Hampton's girl! I journeyed all the way from San Antonio to tell him not to throw away his life." In the seclusion of a cactus-screened embrasure she holds up her lips for his caress.

Though his hungry eyes never leave her, the Captain makes no move to take her to his heart, but whispers in a dazed yet moody way: "You here?"

"Yes, here to tell you to—to live for my sake."

"Impossible!" A horror is on the Texan's face. "Don't you understand?" he shudders. "Don't you know, girl, I have killed your father? Your father's blood is between us," and would turn from her to give some orders.

But she answers: "No father's blood! You thought you killed my father, when it was only a vile wretch impersonating him. The shooting down of those vil-

lains was as great a kindness as man ever did for woman."

"Not your father?" Sharpe passes his hand in a dazed way over his face and mutters: "Impossible!"

"Impossible! Would a daughter's lips salute her father's slayer?" cries Estrella, and bashfully yet tenderly kisses the doubt from her lover's face.

Then the pent up passion of his long despair breaks out in Sharpe Hampton. In a hungry, crazy way, his arms go round his sweetheart as he listens to her hurried yet wondrous tale. At its close he whispers, "Thank God, you've made me want to live!" and gives her kisses so ardent that they reward the girl, who is half swooning on his breast, for all the dangers and troubles of her long journey from San Antonio.

At a distance the fire of battle had illumined his features, but now close to him, Estrella sees what this man must have suffered, and her heart goes out to him even more. She nestles to him, and even with the bullets smiting the wall against which they lean, the two go into a short, blissful love dream.

But now some hasty orders from "The Bravo" call Hampton to active combat. With a hasty, fervid clasp, he shudders: "My own, those devils of guerrillas will butcher you as well as us if they break in," and springs from her to do desperate battle for her safety against constantly increasing odds: for more troops of Mexican cavalry have come, and they now charge up to the ruined gate, hoping to press in by very force of numbers. But the Texans, coolly waiting till the rancheros get within revolver range, open such a fire on the assaulting horsemen that their bodies are piled up around the convent entrance and riderless steeds run everywhere about the plaza.

So the battle goes on. But now, the Texans, under the hot sun, suffer for want of water. And the Irish-

man, coming up, touches his hat and says: "'Ave yes iny spirits left, Capt'in? Langdon's wounded so he's faintin'!"

"Spirits?" cries Estrella. "Florito's! Give me two men to go with me. I can get spirits."

"And water also?" asks Hampton, eagerly.

"Yes, I think so. Tell two men to go with me." She runs off, followed by two rangers, through the little chapel and long passageways, and coming into the big mud-floored room of the woman's convent, finds to her joy a couple of bottles of aguardiente in the saddlebags of the showman and four or five pails of water that had been brought in for the cooking; likewise some frijoles and tasajo. With these she returns and begins to minister to the rangers, begging Hampton to have the wounded carried into the little chapel, where she attends them, pouring spirits down their fainting lips and giving them the attention and care that women give when men most need it.

Now the talk is through the command even as they fight on that Sharpe Hampton's girl, the one he had been crazy for and wished to die for, has come to him. Looking on their leader's face, they know he *wants* to live. He becomes the *rara avis* of the company, the only one who cares very much for life. A haggard frontiersman voices this, between rifle-shots: "I'm glad Sharpe's changed his mind about gettin' rubbed out—but, by Hell, I ain't. My wife and darter are still Comanche squaws."

This idea seems now to affect the Texan Captain. More Mexican reinforcements arriving, he mutters to Estrella, who, despite his orders, has crawled to his side on the firing line: "God, girl, you shouldn't have come here. You make coward thoughts! I get to thinking only how to save you. But I can't leave my wounded to be butchered here."

"Yes, fight it out, Sharpe. Fight it out!" she whispers. "I loved you because you were a brave man. I wouldn't love you if you were a coward."

Looking at the girl, the Texan Captain's face, though at times it has a wild light of happiness, at others, is covered with unutterable despair. To her he once mutters: "I don't think we can get away. We have only fifteen unwounded men now, and the cursed Greasers are bringing up more troops from that valley. Were I alone, I wouldn't mind—but you. Besides, the cartridges are getting low again. We have had to use so many to keep them from firing that field-piece, and they're bringing up another one. When that comes, if I don't stop its discharge, why, I reckon we're gone."

About this time there are wild cries from the Mexicans. Another field-piece is being wheeled into the plaza under the slackening Texan fire. Then suddenly Estrella, who is looking on from as safe an embrasure as can be found, comes to him and whispers: "My God, Sharpe, you mean to do it?"

"Yes, I've got to, dear one. I'm going out to kill those gunners with revolver shots. It's the only thing. Revolver shots at arm's length sicken 'em! Then there'll be no more gunners to fire the piece."

But she has got hold of him and is imploring him: "For God's sake, give yourself one chance. Don't die before my very eyes! Think how I came to save you! Don't go!" then has suddenly screamed: "He's gone for you!"

For the little Bravo has taken two hasty puffs of his cigarette and tossed it away, muttering: "Reckon it's my last one!" and with two big revolvers in his hands has run into the plaza and is shooting down the Mexican gunners just as they are unlimbering the piece. But he is not protected by a flag of truce, and though

he comes staggering in, he falls dying at the feet of Hampton, as Estrella cries: "Why did you do it?"

To her he answers: "Why, Sharpe looked so cursed happy, I thought I'd die instead of him;" then whispers: "A cigarette, please." But after a puff or two his blood chokes him, he coughs, and, opening his arms, as if he were taking some loved form into them, mutters: "Mother!" turns his face away and goes to Heaven—Estrella is sure he goes to Heaven!

As she sobs over the dead, she whispers: "Sharpe, that boy's death is not in vain! I hear something coming down the trail—coming down—horses' hoofs!" Women's senses are sometimes more acute than men's.

The Texan Captain listens and says: "I hear nothing, and yet I have good ears upon the trail"; next abruptly cries: "Boys, there's horses' hoofs—lots of 'em—down the trail from the north. They can't be anything but our troops. Never mind if you shoot your last cartridge now. Give it to the Greasers every chance you get."

Listening, his men hear also the sound of hoofs—many of them—at full gallop, coming down the trail. The Mexican outposts are being drawn in; they are preparing to ride away.

Estrella, gazing at them, gives a gasp of horror. Apparently in revenge for their defeat, they drag out little Florito from the church, put him up in front of the wall, and a firing party sends the traitor to his last account. One of the rangers jeers: "The little Greaser has got his pay from both sides now."

As the head of an American cavalry column enters the plaza, there is a cry: "May's Dragoons!" and right at Estrella's side a man remarks: "And headin' 'em is Wild Harry and that dancing girl, who war spyin' for the Capt'in all last month!"

But Miss Godfrey is too happy now to have aught in



THE DEFENSE OF THE CONVENT WALL

W. G. R.



her but kindness for one she thinks her sister, and who has once more saved the life of the man she loves. She looks on without a jealous pang as Carmelita, riding into the convent garden, calls almost hysterically to the Texan Captain: "*Dios*, Sharpe, saved your life again, didn't I?"

"Whaugh, how we rid," chuckles Harry, who is beside her. "Lucky Worth has taken the Loma and Bishop's Palace, so the cavalry could be let off for this job."

A shout of triumph from the Texans announces they have heard this news also from some troopers of the relieving force, the rest having gone in pursuit of the Mexicans.

Then Mr. Love, nodding towards Carmelita, mutters to Estrella: "She told me about yer. Jingo, yer gritty. Looks as if ye'd made Sharpe fight pretty hard to keep his life this trip." He glances at the scene of combat.

During this the colonel of the relieving force recalls his squadrons, remarking significantly: "Hampton, you've sickened them of fighting for to-day." He points across the plaza towards the shambles around the deserted field-pieces.

Here a young lieutenant, returning with his recalled troop of cavalry, coming up, says: "Thank God, Hampton, I've overtaken you at last! Here's a letter Miss Godfrey charged me to give to you." Then Pelham, gazing astonished at Estrella, mutters: "How did you do it?"

"Fortunately, she got here ahead of her missive, otherwise reckon I'd gone under with so many of my boys," sighs Hampton, looking at his skeleton troop. He is not mounted. Though a fresh horse has been brought up to him, he stands rather holding on the pommel of the saddle.

During these brief moments, Miss Godfrey has twice had Carmelita's name upon her lips, adding to it that of sister, but the other has always turned her head from her as if ashamed.

At Pelham's mention of correspondence, an expression of humiliated misery runs over the dancing girl's vivacious features, her face grows pale as the Texan's before whom her horse is standing. To him she desperately mutters: "Sharpe, here's your correspondence," and pulling from her breast a package of letters, stained and dirty from long mountain travel, hands them to the astonished Captain.

"From whom?" he asks. They are addressed to him in a feminine hand that he has never seen before.

But Miss Godfrey cries: "From me—my letters!"

"Yes, kept from you, Sharpe, by me," murmurs Carmelita. "Oh, it was easy. You were always at the front scouting, I took them from the quartermaster for delivery to you. I—I didn't know they'd make you want to live! How happy your face is! *Adios*, Sharpe." She holds out her hand. "Take it, and forgive me!"

"Where are you going?" asks the ranger, his voice rather low.

"To my countrymen, the Mexicanos, of course!" Carmelita has reined her horse to turn away. Her eyes are full of tears. She looks him in the face and her lips seem to say: "*Querido mio*—forever."

But Hampton, some guess of her design getting into him, cries: "Catch her! She's going to her death! They have shot Florito out on the plaza there for being a spy. Do you suppose they will spare her after having brought you down upon them?"

As he lays hand upon Carmelita's rein, she plucks it from him and shudders: "Stay here to see you and

her? *Por Dios*, no!" and drives the spurs into her mustang.

But Estrella screams: "Stop her! She's trying to get killed!" And being already mounted, rides after her, shouting: "Sister, come back!"

To her imploring, Love and half a dozen other troopers join the chase. But it is difficult to catch a Mexican girl on horseback, and Carmelita nearly reaching the Mexicans, who have turned back, Wild Harry suddenly pulls up his rifle and shoots.

"Don't! She's my sister!" screams Estrella. "Do you want to murder her?"

"No, I want to save her life!" says the frontiersman. "Shoot at the Greasers, boys, as if you war shootin' at ther gal. Shoot! It is the only thing will save her life. Plug close to her, but mind yer eyes and don't hit her."

Under his direction, the troopers pour in a volley from their carbines, which reach one or two of the Mexicans, though Carmelita rides on. They shoot again as if they were shooting at her, all the time Estrella beseeching them: "For God's sake, my sister, my sister!"

Then as the troopers pull up, Wild Harry chuckles: "That war a great idea, plugging at her as if she war an escaping prisoner. That will save her life from the darned Greasers, if anything will. The very notion that we wanted to kill her will make the yaller bellies think she is one of thar kind."

"Do you think they will shoot her?" questions Estrella, in frantic eagerness, as she sees her sister's red sarape disappearing in a cloud of dust, surrounded by Mexican cavalry.

"Reckon not after our tryin' to pot her," cries Love. "Waugh, that war a mighty cute, crazy stratagem of Wild Harry, warn't it?"

Becoming more composed, Miss Godfrey looks about her and says: "Why, Sharpe's not here."

"That's kind of funny," mutters Harry. "The Cap is generally to the front in every scrimmage."

The two ride hastily back, to find the Texan Captain seated on a pile of saddles, and an army surgeon bending over him.

"What's the matter?" asks Miss Godfrey, springing from her horse.

"Nothing to be scared at, Stella!" The Texan's answer is so faint she hardly hears it.

"Nothing! Why, he's been shot for hours," says the surgeon, who is working over him. "He was bleeding slowly to death, and didn't know it. But, thank Providence, I got to him in time, and now, with plenty of woman's nursing——"

"Plenty of woman's nursing," cries Estrella. "Oh, he'll have that."

"Yes, I see he will," remarks the surgeon, drily, for already the girl has soothing hands on her wounded hero.

A little after she turns to the Colonel commanding and says to that grim officer: "You have got to stay here till Hampton has recovered some strength."

"I guess she's about right, sir," remarks the surgeon, "for a day or two, anyway."

So the Colonel leaves Sharpe Hampton in the convent, but leaves two troops of cavalry to protect him and the rest of the wounded.

In a few days the Ranger Captain is brought up through the mountain pass, attended by a devoted woman, who is sighing over him, yet fighting death for him as bravely as he had fought guerrillas to save her.

Thus they reach the city of Monterey, over which the American flag is now flying, and here learn that an armistice of two months has been arranged between

General Taylor and the Mexican military authorities.

From this city Miss Godfrey tries to learn something of Carmelita's fate, but can hear nothing except that no woman has been executed by the Mexicans.

After a time she brings her wounded lover by easy stages to Camargo, still escorted by Wild Harry and Pelham, with a detail of troopers.

Here she is joined by Zelma, and they board a steamer to take them down the Rio Grande to Matamoras. Upon the vessel's deck, taking leave of his lost love, Pelham says rather sadly: "I—I suppose the next time I see you—if I ever come back from the front—you will be Mrs. Hampton."

"I hope so," answers Estrella, her eyes very bright with this idea as she turns them upon her wounded sweetheart, who is now sufficiently recovered to enjoy the air and a cigar upon a camp-stool.

"I know so!" laughs Hampton, who has regained some of his old-time spirit: "By San Jacinto, you couldn't get me to run away from her again even if I had shot three or four daddies. You see, Strella's relatives have been rather hard on us. First, her putative father's death separated us, and then her letters to me were cut off by her real sister. Between ourselves, I rather imagine Carmelita is Sybil."

"I'm sure she is," says Estrella, "and in that matter, Mr. Pelham, I hear your regiment is ordered to join Scott and to go down to the City of Mexico. When there, do what you can, for Heaven's sake, to find my sister and bring her back to me." Here coquetry sparkles in the coming bride's eyes. "You know Sybil is very like me. Just put us in—in—" She pauses embarrassed.

"In airy Mexican nothings, short skirts and bare legs," laughs Hampton, who has heard the dancing girl episode, "and they're as like as two peas."

"Hush," murmurs Estrella, blushing, "Mr. Pelham 'll think you're delirious again, Sharpe!"

"Humph, you offer a very attractive inducement, Miss Godfrey," observes the dragoon, and after he has taken his leave, walks off the steamer's deck, whistling rather contemplatively.

Two months later the big hacienda of Live Oaks is decked for festival. The tenants, settlers and under-overseers are feasting on wild turkey and fresh venison, and every negro on the estate is so full of good things that he can only lie around and yell for his "missie."

This gala day is under the auspices of Mr. Alexander Martin, who has taken charge of his ward's great estate, and with his daughter, the dashing brunette Clara, is now making this festivity for Miss Godfrey's wedding—a simple little frontier ceremony, but oh, how happy a one!

This is indicated by Miss Clara Martin, who gorgeously arrayed in finest New York fashion, has acted as bridesmaid, and now remarks to Wild Harry, who, in the first "biled" shirt he has ever sported in his life, is gazing solemnly at the groom: "Don't they look happy? Captain Hampton could make any girl's heart beat, because he's every inch a man. Though he still walks with a cane, I'd risk him against a grizzly bear. Are there any more like him?"

"Yes," replies Harry, modestly, "thar are five hundred more just like him under Hays, and I'm one of 'em. I'm jist like him. Waugh! That's a mighty cute hint of mine, ain't it?" he chuckles, for his wild eyes have awful suggestions, and Miss Martin is red as fire.

For one of the few times in her life, the New York belle is embarrassed. She has turned away to the bride, who has just been received by Zelma. In a modest maid's dress of white, the octoroon makes a beautiful

picture, her pearly complexion and exquisite tinting giving her Dresden shepherdess effects.

As she curtsies to Estrella, she murmurs: "Dear mistress, did not I say out on the prairie, I'd like Captain Hampton for a master?"

"You have no master now," remarks the bride, radiantly. "Sharpe and I thought we'd do something for you on our wedding day. You're your own mistress. Mr. Martin has your papers of manumission."

"Oh God bless you," cries the girl, and kisses Sharpe's hand as well as his bride's. "But—but I'll never leave you, anyway. I can stay with her, can't I, Captain Hampton, just as you will—forever?"

* * * * *

A year and a half after this, the Mexican war being finished, Captain Hampton and his wife chancing to be in New Orleans, Sharpe buying supplies for the big plantation and Estrella purchasing pretty things for herself and baby, are standing on Canal Street, watching Uncle Sam's soldiers, returning victorious from the Capital of the Montezumas. As May's Dragoons are riding past, a sunburnt officer salutes his colonel and after a few hurried words, apparently receives dismissal. An orderly seizes his horse's bridle as he jumps off and shakes Hampton's hands, saying: "I'm luckier than a good many of the boys—I've got back with life and promotion, and——"

"Did you see anything of my sister, Captain Pelham?" asks Estrella, very eagerly, her eyes filling with tears.

"Why, yes!" answers the Captain, heartily. "I remembered your suggestion, and if you and your husband will come up to the St. Charles Hotel with me, I've—I've a little loot from the Mexican Capital I'd

like to show you. In fact, it's kind of a present to you."

"Yes, but tell me about my sister; is she alive?" whispers Estrella, her eyes growing misty.

"Alive and well, I am happy to say."

"Thank God!"

And they, entering the parlors of the St. Charles Hotel, an ethereal creature in white muslin and big blue sash and well-flounced skirt, after the extreme fashion of that day, tripping from the verandah through its crowd of Creole exquisites, says excitedly: "*Carlos mio*, run and catch Sharpe Hampton! I saw him on the sidewalk below;" then pauses, for Estrella has taken her in her arms, and is whispering: "Sister!"

"Sybil, my dear," remarks Pelham, "you have forgotten the etiquette I've been teaching you. Mrs. Pelham, permit me to introduce Captain Sharpe Hampton."

"Oh, yes, *Dios mio*, Carlos, a gentleman—my brother-in-law—in America, what shall I do, kiss him?"

"Of course," says Hampton, promptly; and Estrella laughs as she sees her husband get his first kiss from Carmelita.

"*Jesus Maria*, I was trying to kiss him for four years, and now, *por Dios*, it doesn't seem very much," laughs Carmelita. "*Carlos mio* has a longer moustache!"

But after a moment, the two gentlemen, as is usual in such cases in the Southwest, go down to liquor to the bar, leaving the ladies together. To her sister, in the course of their chat, Estrella says: "Sybil, how do you get along in civilization?"

"*Esplendido!* I am studying society under my husband's tuition," remarks Carmelita, in fine-lady languor; then breaks out vivaciously: "*Caspita*, already I am the best-dressed woman in the American Army. I get along *magnifico*—everything except wearing

stockings, and, *caramba*, they're the very dickens! But supposing you tell me about my little nephew."

"I'll show him to you," answers Estrella, in mother's pride. And Zelma being summoned, she says: "Bring down Crittenden."

"Crittenden? Oh—ah, Crittenden, the little cigarette-smoking Bravo of The Spy Company."

"Yes, we named our child after the boy who died because 'Sharpe looked so cursed happy,'" murmurs Estrella, her eyes going far away and seeing the sun-burnt plaza, the smoke drifting from the musketry in the church and The Spy Company lining that cactus-covered convent wall and fighting and dying that she might be happy.

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